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CORNELIUS AGRIPPA, THE HUMANIST THEOLOGIAN AND HIS DECLAMATIONS

BY

MARC VAN DER POEL



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PREFACE

This book is a continuation of my doctoral dissertation, which was devoted to the *declamatio* among the humanists (*De declamatio bij de humanisten*, Nieuwkoop, 1987). The dissertation contains a brief history of the reception of the declamation of the late Roman republic and the early empire (the time of Cicero and Seneca the Elder) among the humanists, an outline of the incorporation of the declamation into the school curricula of the Renaissance, and an orientational analysis of the different types of *declamatio* that exist outside the tradition of school education in the Renaissance. One of the conclusions which resulted from this analysis is that declamations such as those of Cornelius Agrippa must be interpreted in the light of the reception of Ciceronian declamation practice, in which the treatment of a political or philosophical topic (*thesis*) plays a central role. The research which resulted in the present book was intended to describe in more detail how Agrippa adapted Ciceronian declamation practice for his own intellectual purposes.

It gradually became clear, however, that this close study of Agrippa's declamations constituted not only a contribution to the reception history of the classical declamation, but also allowed me to formulate some new perspectives on the status of Agrippa as an intellectual. Since the second half of the sixteenth century, there has been a persistent myth that Agrippa was a charlatan, and his use of rhetoric has often been seen as confirmation of the belief that he was a dishonest intellectual whose aim was to deceive his audience. The reevaluation of the declamations thus simultaneously led to a reevaluation of their author. This book, then, presents not only an innovative interpretation of the structure, content and function of Agrippa's declamations, but also contains a new examination of Agrippa's philosophical and theological thought.

This study was made possible by a grant from the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences. I thank the Humanities faculty of the Catholic University of Nijmegen for supporting my research. In particular, I thank Professor J. Bots, director of the Pierre Bayle Institute, for welcoming my research as a part of his interdisciplinary research program Transmission of Culture and Ideas, and my first

Latin teacher at university Professor J. Brouwers, head of the Latin section in the Classics department, for encouraging me to pursue the study of the Latin authors of the Renaissance. His kindness and broad vision of the field of Latin literature and linguistics have always been of great benefit to me.

I have reported on the progress of my research and tried out various aspects of its argument at the 1991 international congress of Neo-Latin studies, the 1992 annual conference of the Dutch section of the International Society for the History of Rhetoric (ISHR), the 1992 meeting of the Belgian National Fund for Scientific Research, section on History of Humanism, the 1992 international congress of the ISHR, the 1994 conference of the Renaissance Society of America, the 1994 Council meeting of the ISHR, and in guest lectures at Texas Tech University, Texas A & M University, Arizona State University (Tempe campus), and Princeton University. I thank the organizers and audiences at each of these presentations for listening to me and, in many cases, for giving me stimulating criticism. I am also grateful to Professor E.C. Coppens (Nijmegen) for being my guide in canon law, to Dr. J. Thijssen (Nijmegen) for sharing with me his knowledge of academic heresy in the Middle Ages, and to Professor R. De Smet (Brussels) for giving me valuable bibliographical information concerning Original Sin. I thank the two anonymous referees, commissioned by the publisher to evaluate my book, for their corrections and useful remarks.

I have a special debt to two specialists in Neo-Latin and Renaissance studies, who have supported me with their expertise but most of all with their long-standing friendship. Kenneth Lloyd-Jones (Trinity College, Hartford, Connecticut), from whom I learned much during our joint work on the *Orationes duae in Tholosam* by Etienne Dolet (published by Droz in Geneva, 1992), put a great deal of effort into helping me with my English. As all students of humanistic rhetoric know, however, pertinence of thought and elegance of language belong so closely together that improvements of grammar and style also bring about a sharpening of the ideas themselves. If my book succeeds in persuading its readers, it will be in no small measure thanks to Ken. P. Tuynman, director of the former Institute of Neo-Latin at the University of Amsterdam, introduced me to Neo-Latin when I was a student in classics during the late seventies, and trained me over the subsequent years as a philologist. He has read chapters four and five

and discussed them with me in detail, and, as always, has assisted me with indispensable advice.

Finally, I thank Professor Arjo Vanderjagt for allowing this book to appear in his series Brill's Studies in Intellectual History, and Mr. Theo Joppe, editor at E.J. Brill's, for publishing it so promptly.

Nijmegen, 15 October 1996.

ABBREVIATIONS

1. WORKS OF AGRIPPA

COLLECTIONS

De beatissimae Annae monogamia:

De beatissimae Annae monogamia, ac unico puerperio propositiones abbreviatæ & articulatae, iuxta disceptationem Iacobi Fabri Stapulensis in libro de tribus & una, intitulo. (. . .) defensio propositionum prænarratarum contra quendam Dominicastrum earundem impugnatores, qui sanctissimam deiparae virginis matrem Annam conatur ostendere polygamam. Quaedam epistolae super eadem materia atque super lite contra eiusdem ordinis haereticorum magistro habita, s.l., 1534 [British Library, London, 4823 aaaa 5].

Collected Orations:

Orationes X, quorum catalogum versa exhibebit pagella. (. . .) de duplici coronatione Caroli V Caesaris apud Bononiam, historiola. (. . .) epigrammata, Cologne, 1535 [Royal Library, The Hague, 226 j 37].

Collected Treatises:

De Nobilitate & Praecellentia Foeminei sexus, ad Margaretam Augustam Austriaco[rum] & Burgundionum Principem, Expostulatio cum Ioanne Catilineti super expositione libri Ioannis Capnionis de verbo mirifico, De sacramento Matrimonii declamatio ad Margaretam Alenconiae Ducem, De triplici ratione cognoscendi Deum liber unus ad Guilielmum Paleologum Marcionem Montisferrati, Dehortatio Gentilis theologiae ad Episcopum Vasatensem, De Originali peccato disputabilis opinionis declamatio ad episcopum Cyrenensem, Regimen adversus pestilentiam ad eundem episcopum, Antwerp, 1529 [Royal Library, The Hague, 229 G 41].

Opera:

Opera, quaecumque hactenus vel in lucem prodierunt, vel inveniri potuerunt omnia, in duos tomos concinne digesta, & diligenti studio recognita (. . .), 2 vols., Lyon, s.a., repr. Hildesheim, 1970, with an introduction by R.H. Popkin.

N.B. This reprinted edition of the *Opera* is less complete than the edition which bears the title *Opera, in duos tomos concinne digesta, et nunc denuo, sublatis omnibus mendis in φιλομούσων gratiam accuratissime recusa. (. . .), 2 vols., Lyon, s.a.* [University Library, Amsterdam, 1199 F 8]. The following texts do not occur in the reprinted edition: in volume 1, the *Ars notoria nunquam edita* (one of the various texts on magic not written by Agrippa, printed as an appendix to Agrippa's texts on occultism); in volume 2 the *Apologia, Querela, Tabula abbreviata in artem brevem R. Lullii* and the *Defensio*; see Prost, vol. 2, Appendice, note 32, pp. 517–521.

INDIVIDUAL WORKS

Apologia:

Apologia adversus calumnias propter Declamationem de Vanitate scientiarum, & excellentia verbi Dei, sibi per aliquos Lovanienses Theologistas intentatas. Quærela super calumnia, ob eandem Declamationem per aliquos sceleratissimos sycophantas, apud Caesaream Maiest. nefarie ac proditorie illata, s.l., 1533 [University Library, Utrecht, Philosophici theorectici Octavo, no. 63].

Defensio:

Defensio propositionum prænarratarum contra quendam Dominicastrum earundem impugnatores, qui sanctissimam deiparæ virginis matrem Annam conatur ostendere polygamam, quoted after *De beatissimæ Annæ monogamia*.

Epistolæ:

Epistolæ ad familiares, libri VII, quoted after *Opera*, vol. 2. This edition of the *Epistolæ* is the same as the edition in the *Opera*, in duos tomos concinne digesta, etc.

Expostulatio:

Expostulatio super expositione sua in librum de verbo Mirifico cum Ioanne Catilineti fratrum Franciscanorum per Burgundiam provinciali ministro sacrae Theologiae doctori, quoted after *Collected Treatises and Opera*, vol. 2.

De incertitudine:

De incertitudine et vanitate scientiarum et artium, atque excellentia verbi Dei declamatio, quoted after the Antwerp, 1531 edition [Apud Florentissimam Antuerpiam, 1531; University Library, Amsterdam, Ned. Inc. 344] and *Opera*, vol. 2.

De nobilitate et præcellentia foeminei sexus:

De Nobilitate & Præcellentia Foeminei sexus, ad Margaretam Augustam Austriaco[rum] & Burgundionum Principem, quoted after *Collected Treatises, Opera*, vol. 2, and the edition by R. Antonioli et al., Geneva, 1990, referred to as Antonioli.

Oratio habita Papiæ:

Oratio habita Papiæ in praelectione Hermetis Trismegisti de potestate et sapientia Dei, quoted after *Collected Orations, Opera*, vol. 2, and the edition by P. Zambelli in: E. Garin et al., eds., *Testi umanistici sull' ermetismo. Testi di Ludovico Lazarelli, F. Giorgio Veneto, Cornelio Agrippa di Nettesheim*, Rome, 1955, pp. 119–136.

De originali peccato:

De originali peccato disputabilis opinionis declamatio, quoted after *Collected Treatises and Opera*, vol. 2.

Propositiones:

De beatissimæ Annæ monogamia, ac unico puerperio propositiones abbreviatae & articulatae, iuxta disceptationem Iacobi Fabri Stapulensis in libro de tribus & una, intitulato, quoted after *De beatissimæ Annæ monogamia*.

Querela:

see full title under *Apologia*.

De sacramento matrimonii:

De sacramento Matrimonii declamatio, quoted after the 1526 edition [s.l., s.a.; Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, Rés. D 65136], *Collected Treatises and Opera*, vol. 2.

De triplici ratione cognoscendi Deum:

Liber de triplici ratione cognoscendi Dei, quoted after *Collected Treatises* and the partial edition by P. Zambelli, in E. Garin et al., eds., *Testi umanistici sull' ermetismo. Testi di Ludovico Lazarelli, F. Giorgio Veneto, Cornelio Agrippa di Nettesheim*, Rome, 1955, pp. 146–162.

2. WORKS OF ERASMUS

Allen: Des. Erasmus, *Opus epistolarum*, eds. P.S. Allen—H.M. Allen, 12 vols., Oxford, 1906–1958 (repr. 1992).

LB: *Erasmii Opera omnia*, ed. J. Leclerc, 10 vols., Leiden, 1703–1706 (repr. London, 1962).

ASD: *Opera omnia Desiderii Erasmi recognita et adnotatione critica instructa notisque illustrata*, Amsterdam, 1969–.

3. JURIDICAL SOURCES

ROMAN LAW

- | | |
|-------|---|
| Inst. | Institutiones (Corpus Iuris Civilis, vol. 1, ed. P. Krueger—T. Mommsen, Berlin, 1854) |
| Dig. | Digesta (Corpus Iuris Civilis, vol. 1, ed. P. Krueger—T. Mommsen, Berlin, 1854) |
| Cod. | Codex Justinianus (Corpus Iuris Civilis, vol. 2, ed. P. Krueger, Berlin, 1854) |
| Nov. | Novellae (Corpus Iuris Civilis, vol. 3, ed. R. Schoell—G. Kroll, Berlin, 1891) |

In a few cases I have made use of the edition of the *Corpus juris civilis* by A. and M. Kriegel, 3 vols., Leipzig, 1840–1843 (and later editions).

CANON LAW

Canon law is cited following the critical edition of A. Friedberg, *Corpus Iuris Canonici*, 2 vols., Leipzig, 1879, repr. Graz, 1959. Within this collection, references are given following the standard method, thus:

- | | |
|-------------------------------|--|
| – D. 21 c. 1 | <i>Decretum Gratiani</i> , pars 1, distinctio 21, canon 1 |
| – C. 16 q. 1 c. 5 | <i>Decretum Gratiani</i> , pars 2, causa 16, quaestio 1, canon 5 |
| – De pen. D. 3 c. 1 | <i>Tractatus de penitencia</i> , Distinctio 3, canon 1 |
| – De cons. D. 3 c. 1 | <i>Decretum Gratiani</i> , pars 3, De consecratione, Distinctio 3, canon 1 |
| – X 3.21.5 | <i>Decretales Gregorii IX</i> , liber 3, titulus 21, caput 5 |
| – In VI ^o 1, 6, 17 | <i>Liber sextus decretalium</i> , liber 1, titulus 6, caput 17 |

4. BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCE WORKS AND EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITERS

Bibliotheca Belgica: Bibliotheca Belgica. Bibliographie générale des Pays-Bas, fondée par F. van der Haeghen, réédité sous la direction de M.-Th. Lenger. Nouvelle impression de l'édition de 1964, 6 vols., Brussels, 1979.

Deutsche Gesamtkatalog: Gesamtkatalog der preussischen Bibliotheken (. . .), vol. 1, Vienna—Berlin, 1931 (Kraus repr. 1976).

Die Deutsche Literatur: W.-D. Müller-Jahncke, art. Agrippa von Nettesheim, Heinrich Cornelius, in: *Die Deutsche Literatur. Biographisches und bibliographisches Lexikon*. Reihe II (*Die Deutsche Literatur zwischen 1450 und 1620*), Abteilung A: Autorenlexikon, Bern—Frankfurt am Main—New York, 1990.

Index Aureliensis: Index Aureliensis. Catalogus librorum sedecimo seculo impressorum. Pars prima, tomus 1, Aureliae Aquensis [Baden-Baden] 1962, repr. 1965.

National Union Catalog, pre-1956 imprints: The National Union Catalog, pre-1956 Imprints: a cumulative author list representing Library of Congress printed cards and titles reported by other American libraries, 754 vols., London, 1968–1981.

Nijhoff-Kronenberg I: W. Nijhoff—M.E. Kronenberg, *Nederlandsche bibliographie van 1500 tot 1540*, The Hague, 1923.

Nijhoff-Kronenberg II: W. Nijhoff—M.E. Kronenberg, *Nederlandsche bibliographie van 1500 tot 1540*, tweede deel, The Hague, 1940.

CSEL: Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum

Patrologia Latina: Patrologiae cursus completus, Series Latina, 221 vols. (including 4 vols. of indexes), ed. J.-P. Migne, Paris, 1844–1864 (repr. 1878–1890). Supplementum, 5 vols., ed. A. Hamman, Paris, 1958–1974.

Patrologia Graeca: Patrologiae cursus completus, Series Graeca, 161 vols., ed. J.-P. Migne, Paris, 1857–1866. Indices, ed. F. Cavallero, Paris, 1912.

5. STUDIES

Morley: H. Morley, *Cornelius Agrippa. The Life of Henry Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim, Doctor and Knight, Commonly known as a Magician*, 2 vols., London, 1856.

Prost: A. Prost, *Les sciences et les arts occultes au XVI^e siècle. Cornelle Agrippa. Sa vie et ses œuvres*, Paris, 1881–1882; repr. Nieuwkoop, 1965.

Nauert: Ch. Nauert, Jr., *Agrippa and the Crisis of Renaissance Thought*, Urbana, 1965.

Note on the Latin texts

Since the various Renaissance editions from which Agrippa's and other texts are quoted are not consistent in matters of spelling, abbreviation, punctuation and capitalization, I have, for the sake of convenience, expanded abbreviations, separated ligatures, removed diacritical marks, written c or t according to classical usage, and adopted the modern conventions of capitalization, punctuation, usage of u/v, and printing of j as i. Occasional misspellings have in most cases been silently corrected.

Note on the translation of Biblical quotations

For references to and quotations from Biblical passages, Agrippa used the Vulgate. For the translation of quotations, I have used *The New American Bible, Translated from The Original Languages with Critical Use of All the Ancient Sources* (. . .), ed. 1970 (Old Testament), ed. 1986 (Revised New Testament), ed. 1991 (Revised Psalms).

INTRODUCTION

AGRIPPA'S LEGACY

Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa (1486–1535) is both an historical figure and a myth. To the modern reader, he is first and foremost the archetype of the Renaissance man, the pre-Enlightenment physician, the superstitious astrologer and black magician who tries to overcome the bonds of earthly existence. As such, Agrippa occupies his own small but significant place in European literature, as both a horrifying and an alluring figure. Thus, Mary Shelley (1797–1851) introduced Agrippa as the first guide in natural philosophy to her creation Victor von Frankenstein. Frankenstein first read 'the wonderful facts which he (Agrippa) relates' with enthusiasm at the age of thirteen. Soon he studied Agrippa, and later also Paracelsus and Albertus Magnus, with great delight, even though his father warned his young son with visionary prudence against Agrippa with the words, 'Ah! Cornelius Agrippa! My dear Victor, do not waste your time upon this; it is sad trash.'¹ Shelley presented some years later, in her charming short story *The Mortal Immortal*, the figure of Winzy, a one-time friend of Agrippa and assistant in the alchemist's workshop during the 1510s. Winzy, so Shelley's story goes, had acquired immortality by drinking a philtre prepared by Agrippa and, in 1833, he recalls memories of his former master on his three hundred and twenty-third birthday. Reflecting the contradictory reactions which Agrippa as a man with supernatural powers might evoke, Shelley presents Winzy both as an admirable person because of his ability to overcome the constraints of nature, and as a doomed one, because, having survived all his family and loved ones and being condemned to live in a world where he no longer understands anything, he is no longer a true member of the human community.² All in all, Winzy is presented without indignation, as a pathetic victim of his own superstition. Mary Shelley's miraculous Agrippa is, of course, the

¹ Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein or the Modern Prometheus* (first published 1818), ch. 2, p. 38.

² Mary Shelley, *Collected Tales and Stories*, pp. 219–230.

immediate descendant of the character imagined by Christopher Marlowe (1564–1593); in his play on the life and death of the famous alchemist Doctor Faustus, Marlowe had his hero Faust proclaim that he ‘will be as cunning as Agrippa was,/Whose shadows [i.e. the shades or spirits invoked by Agrippa] made all Europe honour him’ (Act i, scene 1, 116–117). Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus* was, as is well known, the first in a long series of Faust plays in Western European literature.

Agrippa obtained the legendary reputation on which Marlowe and Shelley were building mostly because he was an avid student of occult philosophy, an occupation traditionally looked upon with great suspicion by the Church. Already during his own lifetime, as Agrippa himself related, priests were denouncing Agrippa as a *magus*, an evil sorcerer, in their sermons.³ During the decades after Agrippa’s death, oral tradition fabricated a number of tales claiming that the author of *De occulta philosophia* had in fact been an accomplice of the devil. The oldest known and most widespread of these legends is the famous dog story coined or recorded by Paulus Jovius (1483–1552) in his biographical dictionary. Jovius tells his readers that Agrippa died in solitude, despised by many who suspected him of necromancy because he used to be accompanied by the devil in the shape of a dog. Shortly before his death, the story continues, Agrippa repented and, recognizing the dog as the cause of his ruin, untied its collar, which was inscribed with magical signs, and ordered it to leave him. Thereupon the dog, in spite of its lifelong fidelity to its master, ran away, leaving its master to face death in complete solitude. The dog was later seen to jump in the river Saône, and nobody ever saw it swim out again.⁴ This story was credible because it fitted into traditional stories concerning sorcerers,⁵ and it gained further authority when it was repeated in popular works such as Andreas Hondorffius’s (d. 1573) *exempla* collection (first edition 1574)⁶ and André Thevet’s

³ *Querela*, fol. L ij^r.

⁴ P. Jovius, *Elogia doctorum virorum (. . .) illustrium (. . .)*, cap. xci, ed. 1557, pp. 223–224 (first edition 1546).

⁵ It was a common belief in the sixteenth century that the devil could appear in the shape of a dog (see Allen Woods, *The Devil in Dog Form. A Partial Type-Index of Devil Legends*, pp. 142–144).

⁶ A. Hondorffius, *Theatrum historicum sive promptuarium illustrium exemplorum, ad honeste, pie, beateque vivendum cuiusvis generis (. . .)*, ed. 1607, p. 167 (exempla secundi praecepti, ch. ‘de magicis artibus’, example 12).

(1502–1590) biographical dictionary.⁷ Similar stories were disseminated, sometimes linking Agrippa with other men reputed to be sorcerers. Thus, the Jesuit Martinus Delrius (1551–1608) relates in his *Disquisitionum magicarum libri VI* (1599), a well-known work during the Renaissance, the tale that Faustus and Agrippa used to pay their tavern bills with counterfeit money. After a few days, the coins with which they had paid proved to be pieces of horn or some other kind of worthless trash.⁸ Agrippa further appears in other sixteenth-century books recording stories of black magic, such as those of Goltwurm (1557) and Lercheimer (1585).⁹

The prejudice which had been raised against Agrippa by the Church and confirmed by both myth and forgery was articulated, sometimes with venom, by both scholarly and literary writers of the seventeenth century.¹⁰ For instance, when the satirist Francisco Quevedo (1580–1645) described Hell and its inhabitants in his *Sueños* of 1627, he mentions among the alchemists and astrologers Peter of Abano in the company of Agrippa, whose soul, Quevedo says, was burning in the four parts of his cursed and banned works.¹¹ Peter of Abano was the thirteenth-century author of the *Magica elementa*, a text on black magic. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Abano was regularly quoted in connection with Agrippa, because his writing was often printed together with another work on black magic, an anonymous manual for invoking spirits, which passed for the fourth book of Agrippa's *De occulta philosophia libri tres*. Absurd stories serving

⁷ *Les vrais portraits et vies des hommes illustres grecz, Latins et payens...*, ed. 1584, vol. 2, fols. 542^r–544^v (s.n.: Agrippa).

⁸ Delrius, *Liber II, quaest. XII*, ed. 1679, p. 164.

⁹ Caspar Goltwurm, *Wunderwerck und Wunderzeichen Buch*; Augustin Lercheimer, *Christlich Bedencken und Erinnerung von Zauberey*. See Baron, 'Trithemius und Faust: Begegnungen in Geschichte und Sage', p. 50 and p. 53.

¹⁰ For instance M. Mersenne condemned Agrippa as 'Archimagus' in his *Quaestiones celeberrimae in Genesim*, ed. 1623, col. 590). M. Adam, *Dignorum laude virorum (...)* *immortalitas, seu vitae theologorum, jure-consultorum & politicorum, medicorum atque philosophorum*, third ed. (...), 1705, vitae medicorum, pp. 7–9. Adam is excerpted by P. Freher, *Theatrum virorum eruditione clarorum*, ed. 1688, pp. 1221–1222. D. Ancillon, *Mélange critique de littérature, recueillie des conversations de feu M. Ancillon (...)*, 3 vols., ed. 1698, vol. 1, pp. 68–75. Th.-Pope Blount, *Censura celebriorum authorum (...)*, ed. 1710 (first edition 1690), pp. 549–551 (Blount cites Jovius in full). S. Majolus, *Dierum canicularium tomus VII*, ultima ed., 1642, mentions several tales concerning Agrippa in Tomus II, colloquium 3 (on stories concerning all forms of magic), e.g. pp. 454B–D; 456E; 463D. L. Moréri, *Le grand dictionnaire historique (...)*, Nouvelle et dernière édition, 1718 (first edition 1698), p. 126.

¹¹ Quevedo, *Sueños*, p. 161.

to confirm the belief that Agrippa had been in communication with the devil circulated until at least the beginning of the eighteenth century. In 1725, J.G. Schelhorn narrated in an article on Agrippa, written as a supplement to P. Bayle's entry 'Agrippa' in the *Dictionnaire historique et critique* (first edition 1695–1697), that a friend of his had heard it said that Agrippa had taught public courses in two different places at the same time, namely from nine to ten in Freiburg, Germany, and the following hour in Pont-à-Mousson, France.¹² As far as can be ascertained, Agrippa never set foot in either town.

The article on Agrippa in P. Bayle's (1647–1706) *Dictionnaire* contains a comprehensive and reliable account of Agrippa's life based entirely on the correspondence of four hundred and fifty one letters, which was collected, in chronological order, and published as a part of the *Opera*-editions of the late sixteenth century.¹³ Bayle refuted all the devil stories in this article, but the mythical dimension of Agrippa's reputation as a magician nevertheless remained in popular circulation. On the other hand, it does seem that Agrippa's involvement with magic was no longer rejected with hateful disdain as a menace to the integrity of Christian society, but rather labelled as the delusion of a psychologically unstable mind, a ready victim of the superstition which was assumed to have generally reigned during the sixteenth century. The above-quoted judgement of Frankenstein's father is typical in this regard. As an example of the scholarly literature of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries exemplifying this attitude, one can mention C. Meiners, who wrote in an otherwise reliable biographical sketch of Agrippa (1795) that the Jovius story is credible, given the unstable character of Agrippa and the particulars of his life. Meiners stresses that in his own day these silly things

¹² J.G. Schelhorn, *Amoenitates literariae, quibus variae observationes, scripta item quaedam anecdota & rariora Opuscula exhibentur*, vol. 2, editio altera correctior, 1730 (first edition 1725), pp. 553–596 (588–590: the legends); pp. 513–529 contains a bibliographical essay on Agrippa's works, specially *De incertitudine*.

¹³ P. Bayle, *Dictionnaire historique et critique*, sixième édition, revue, corrigée, et augmentée, vol. 1, pp. 103–111. The detailed refutation of the legends, pp. 107–109, note (P). In 1661, the Dutchman J. Oudaan (1628–1692) published, as an appendix to the second edition of his translation of *De incertitudine*, a complete biography based on the correspondence. Oudaan also dismissed the devil stories and expressed the view that the Catholic Church was responsible for Agrippa's bad reputation as a sorcerer (*Van de onzekerheyd en ydelheid der wetenschappen en konsten* (. . .), ed. 1661, pp. 497–653; the devil stories and the opinion about their source at pp. 640–653).

are no longer believed.¹⁴ A similar approach, characterized by gentle mockery of Agrippa's instability and the primitive credulity of his age can be detected in the biographies of H. Morley and A. Prost, published in 1856 and 1881–1882 respectively. And in 1913, F. Mauthner still voiced the hostile prejudice which had been formulated against Agrippa for so long, calling him names like 'Erzcharlatan' and 'dezi-dierter Nichtchrist'.¹⁵

One of the reasons why it has proved so difficult to grasp the historical Agrippa was clearly the fact that, for the readers who believed that Agrippa was a charlatan and a sorcerer, some of his works confirm this reputation. This is especially the case for *De incertitudine*, which had already been condemned as heretical by theologians of the Sorbonne and of the University of Louvain during Agrippa's lifetime. As late as 1729, Gottfried Arnold wrote in his survey of the heresies from New Testament times until 1688 that Agrippa had been deservedly condemned as a heretic on account of his attacks on the Roman Catholic Church in *De incertitudine*.¹⁶ More generally, *De incertitudine* was often interpreted as the expression of sceptical irresolution unworthy of the true Christian. Traces of this judgment can be found as early as a decade after Agrippa's death, in the remarks made on *De incertitudine* by the reformed scholar Konrad Gesner (1516–1565).¹⁷ The confusion which *De incertitudine* could cause on account of what was perceived as its scepticism is exemplified by the youthful Goethe

¹⁴ *Lebensbeschreibungen berühmter Männer aus den Zeiten der Wiederherstellung der Wissenschaften*, vol. 1, p. 387.

¹⁵ F. Mauthner, Introduction to the translation of *De incertitudine*, vol. 1, pp. I ff.; *Der Atheismus und seine Geschichte im Abendlande*, vol. 1, pp. 411–414. See on Mauthner's judgment of Agrippa S. Wollgast in the *Nachwort* to the 1993 German translation of *De incertitudine*, p. 297 (pp. 293–306 contain a survey of the representation of Agrippa in twentieth-century scholarly literature).

¹⁶ G. Arnold, *Unparteiische Kirchen- und Ketzerhistorie, vom Anfang des Neuen Testaments bis auf das Jahr Christi 1688*, Book XVI, c. 22, par. 20–22, ed. 1727 (repr., 1967), pp. 788–789.

¹⁷ 'Hic author (i.e., Agrippa) in plerisque Romanae ecclesiae consentit, in multis dissentit, auctoritati ipsius derogans, nuptias sacerdotum suadens, imaginum omnem usum taxans, cucullam diaboli inventum asserens, recentiorum theologorum, ut Scoti, Thomae, scripta reiiciens, etc. In quibusdam parum constans, nec ausus animi sententiam proferre' [This author agrees with the Roman Church concerning most things, but he disagrees with it concerning many other things, disparaging its authority, recommending marriage to priests, attacking every use of images, asserting that the monk's hood is an invention of the devil, rejecting the writings of modern theologians such as Scotus and Thomas, etc. In some things he was wavering and did not dare to speak his real mind] (*Bibliotheca universalis, sive catalogus omnium scriptorum locupletissimus* (. . .), (1545), fol. 309^v).

(1749–1832), who was thrown into considerable confusion for some time by his reading of *De incertitudine*, as he recalls in his autobiography. *De incertitudine* had been recommended to him by Hofrat Hüsken, a man who was himself, as Goethe noted, at variance with God and the world.¹⁸ Although the historian of philosophy J. Brucker (1696–1770) had already refuted the thesis that Agrippa had embraced a sceptical philosophy in *De incertitudine*,¹⁹ at the beginning of this century authors like G. Rossi (1906) and R. Stadelmann (1929) still maintained that Agrippa had in fact been a sceptic. Thus, Stadelmann wrote, for example, that Agrippa aimed at a pointless spiritual equanimity and ‘Nichtwissenwollen.’²⁰

Another important factor which helped to preserve the prejudice against Agrippa was the fact that his declamations (like those of other humanists) were usually not considered, during the later sixteenth century and after, as serious scholarly treatises, but as literary set pieces written for the sake of entertainment. Thus, we shall discuss in due course how it was common to believe (a belief still shared by some modern scholars) that Agrippa, in his declamations *De nobilitate et praecellentia foeminei sexus* and *De incertitudine*, defended the superiority of the feminine sex and attacked the arts and sciences solely in order to show his talent for sharp but useless paradoxical reasoning. Likewise, we shall see that it was impossible for theologians to imagine that Agrippa’s declamation *De originali peccato* reflected the author’s true opinion. In spite of the fact that a good deal of work has been done on Agrippa (especially on Agrippa the occultist) in the last decades (the numerous studies by Paola Zambelli and the reliable biography of Charles Nauert, Jr. deserve special mention), Agrippa, as both a human being and a scholar, still remains a somewhat enigmatic figure. This is due in part to the above-mentioned traditional

¹⁸ Goethe, *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, Erster Teil, 4. Buch (Hamburger Ausgabe, vol. 9, p. 162).

¹⁹ I. Brucker, *Historia critica philosophiae a tempore resuscitarum in occidente literarum ad nostra tempora*, tom. IV, pars I, pp. 419–421 (‘Agrippa an scepticus?’).

²⁰ G. Rossi, *Agrippa di Nettesheim e la direzione scettica della filosofia del rinascimento*. R. Stadelmann, ‘Zweifel und Verzweiflung bei Agrippa von Nettesheim’. For a refutation of Stadelmann’s thesis and a valuable discussion of the purport of *De incertitudine*, see Metzke, ‘Die “Skepsis” des Agrippa von Nettesheim. Eine Studie zur Geschichte des deutschen Geistes im ausgehenden Mittelalter’. Backus, ‘Agrippa on “Human Knowledge of God” and “Human Knowledge of the External World”,’ offers excellent observations on Agrippa’s epistemology, against the thesis that Agrippa was a sceptic.

reputation of Agrippa as an impostor and a heretic, one which seems difficult even for unbiased modern scholars to relinquish. Furthermore, the twentieth-century scholar has his own limitations, in that he lives in a culture that is ill at ease with men such as Agrippa, who were continuously engaged in various activities which are hardly compatible in our modern world. Agrippa indeed exercised such widely dissimilar professions as soldier, university professor, physician, legal advisor, ambassador, scientist and alchemist. He further combined, as a scholar, practical research in various branches of natural philosophy with philosophical and theological speculation relating Christian orthodoxy, such as it has been developed by the principal Church Fathers, to more abstruse cabalistic, Neoplatonic and Hermetic questions. As a theologian, he considered the contemplative existence of those who abandon the world and live in chastity for the kingdom of heaven to be theoretically of a higher intrinsic value than his own existence as an inquisitive explorer of nature and a responsible family man (although his message as a theologian to his contemporaries was that each person, in his or her own position in life, can lead a theologically sound life by cultivating a proper attitude toward faith). Even Agrippa himself was aware, though not necessarily with regret, that his life-style prohibited him from putting his own spiritual ideals into practice, and he once admitted to a friend that he had never had the mystical experience of union with God for which he felt everyone should aim.²¹

The starting-point of the research which led to the present book was the question of whether Agrippa's declamations should be read, as is often claimed, as literary set pieces which do not voice the author's true opinion, or rather as serious scholarly treatises. In the course of an earlier study on the declamation in the Renaissance, I reached the firm conclusion that, in general, sixteenth-century scholars studied rhetoric in the tradition of Cicero, who had seen himself as the man who could save the Roman republic by his eloquence, and of Quintilian, the most articulate and thorough defender of the theory of the *orator as vir bonus dicendi peritus*. Much of the humanists' own practise of rhetoric was aimed at the propagation of their high-minded moral ideas; they were thus seeking to contribute to the moral and

²¹ See *Epistolae*, 5, 19, d.d. 19 November 1527, pp. 880–881. See below, chapter 1, p. 30 and note 53.

spiritual regeneration of the *res publica Christiana*, which was then experiencing a deep crisis, before it was split asunder by the Reformation.²² Against the background of my earlier study, the present study is meant to present a detailed analysis of Agrippa's declamations within the context of his other writings.

The main conclusion which this book proposes is that Agrippa's declamations are serious, theological treatises, in which the author makes an effort to convince the reader that his viewpoint concerning the topic at hand is the correct one. In most cases, the point he is making is rather theoretical, since Agrippa's declamations (especially *De nobilitate et praecellentia foeminei sexus*, *De originali peccato* and *De sacramento matrimonii*) contain mainly Biblical exegesis aimed at explaining the author's ideas concerning the deeper, symbolic meaning of certain important Biblical texts, especially the Creation in Genesis. But it will also become clear that Agrippa's declamations are not alien to the revival of Ciceronian and Quintilianean notions concerning the moral commitment of the public speaker. This applies especially to *De incertitudine*, Agrippa's most hortatory writing. Starting from the Neoplatonic idea that the most important thing in life is humanity's relationship with the Creator, Agrippa passionately urges the scholars of his time to grant faith the rightful place it deserves in their lives.

As a Neoplatonist with a bent for mysticism, Agrippa had many ideas which are on the whole difficult to understand. Nevertheless, it has become clear to me in the course of this research that Agrippa's Neoplatonic principles completely directed his life and thought. Given this profound influence, his life and thought show, to my mind, an inner consistency and sincerity which stand in sharp contrast with his reputation as a dishonest charlatan and a mentally unstable person. Hence, this study is organized in such a way as to bring out, as convincingly as possible, the integrity and sincerity of Agrippa's life and thought.

If we read systematically through Agrippa's correspondence, we are struck by the fact that Agrippa was continually involved on the one hand in the research of *res arcanae* or *secreta*, the secrets of nature, and on the other hand in discussions concerning religious matters, ranging from the essence of faith and the importance of the *prisca theologia* to current discussions on Christian doctrine and day to day Church politics. In order to assess Agrippa in an objective way (and

²² See Van der Poel, *De declamatio bij de humanisten*. An outline of this study in Van der Poel, 'The Latin *Declamatio* in Renaissance Humanism.'

thus to dissociate ourselves completely from the legendary reputation of Agrippa as a magician and a heretic), it is important to understand that the two areas of Agrippa's intellectual activities which seem contradictory to the twentieth-century mind were, for Agrippa, in fact closely connected with each other. Agrippa's enthusiasm for the secrets of nature is justified by his Neoplatonic conviction that God manifests Himself in various ways in the created world. Agrippa studied the created world in all its theoretical aspects and practical applications, including alchemy, astrology, medicine, geology, mechanics.²³ He also carefully studied astrology,²⁴ and used (or rather, was forced to use, as in the case of Louise of Savoy) his knowledge to predict the future for people who believed in astrological prognostication,²⁵ but he himself disdained such popular belief.²⁶ He received a doctorate in medicine, probably at Pavia in 1515;²⁷ he regularly treated patients, and during his stay in Geneva and Freiburg he worked as a professional physician.²⁸ Agrippa also developed medicines, one of which he described in the *Contra pestem antidota*,²⁹ and he gave a

²³ See Müller-Jahncke, 'The Attitude of Agrippa von Nettesheim (1486–1535) towards Alchemy,' for an expert analysis of a number of letters describing or referring to alchemical experiments which Agrippa conducted or in which he participated. Müller-Jahncke stresses that Agrippa's attitude towards these experiments was rational, and that he criticized the credulity of those alchemists who tried to make gold. See in this context also Daniels, Jr., 'Knowledge and Faith in the Thought of Cornelius Agrippa', which stresses that empiricism is the foundation of *De occulta philosophia*.

²⁴ E.g. *Epistolae*, 3, 56–57, d.d. 1524, pp. 759–761. Agrippa wrote a brief tract on geomancy (*In geomanticam disciplinam lectura*) which was published for the first time in the *Opera*, vol. 1, pp. 520–526. See on this writing *De incertitudine*, chapter 13 (ed. 1531, fol. 31^r; *Opera*, p. 42) and *Epistolae*, 4, 20 and 27, d.d. 23 June–23 July 1526, pp. 799 and 807.

²⁵ E.g. *Epistolae*, 3, 55, on the day that the sun went through the fifth part of Sagittarius, 1523, p. 758, and the prognostications which Agrippa wrote for Louise of Savoy.

²⁶ See, e.g., the comments which he made on Louise of Savoy's superstitiousness in *Epistolae*, 4, 4, 8, 19, 29 and 30, d.d. 1526, pp. 784–785, 789–790, 798–799, 809–811). See also Nauert, pp. 204–206 and 318–321, and Zambelli, 'Umanesimo magico-astrologico e raggruppamenti segreti nei platonici della preriforma,' pp. 157 ff. (on a mock astrological calendar [*Prognosticon*], which Agrippa wrote).

²⁷ *Epistolae*, 2, 19, d.d. 6 February 1518, p. 666: 'post utriusque iuris et medicinae (...) acceptis scholastico more tiara et annulis' [after the reception, following academic custom, of the mark of honor belonging to the doctorate in both civil and canon law and in medicine]; *Epistolae*, 7, 21, n.d.; *Opera*, p. 1022: 'utriusque iuris et medicinarum doctor evasi' [I became a doctor in both civil and canon law and in medicine]. Nauert, p. 72, note 40, records that the Geneva archives of the Conseil général mention Agrippa as doctor of arts and medicine.

²⁸ See the historical evidence in Nauert, pp. 72–73 and 79.

²⁹ *Collected Treatises*, fols. K 4^v–K 7^v; *Opera*, pp. 588–592.

clinical description of the symptoms of the plague that killed his wife in 1529, and of a new kind of medicine against this plague.³⁰ Two lost writings illustrate Agrippa's activities in the field of mechanics and geology. The first was a report on fire-arms and war-engines written for the French king Francis I, called *Pyromachia*,³¹ the second a work on mining and minerals.³²

Agrippa's motivation for all these activities and investigations was, paradoxical though it may seem to us, the conviction that they brought him closer to God. Once, in 1518, when he returned definitively to the North after a prolonged stay in Italy, Agrippa suggested in a letter to an old friend that the study of the secrets of nature was detrimental to his soul and that he planned to interrupt it in order to focus solely on the study of Scripture.³³ Nevertheless, the complete correspondence provides overwhelming proof that Agrippa never ceased to investigate the phenomena of nature, because he was convinced that if scientific research is undertaken and conducted with an indestructible faith in God, it does not present any dark threat, but in fact constitutes the highest form of philosophy. It is for this reason that, in 1533, Agrippa called occult philosophy the 'absoluta consummatio philosophiae' which opens the way to the knowledge of God.³⁴ As such, he felt that occult philosophy did not deserve to be condemned by the Church, and he always defended it as being fully compatible with the doctrinal teaching of Rome.

The second topic which Agrippa constantly studied was theology, or rather, *res sacrae*. As a Neoplatonist, Agrippa felt that the study of *res sacrae* must contribute to the restoration of the pristine, unimpeded relation which humanity used to have with God before the Fall, just as the investigation of the secrets of nature also brings humanity closer to the Creator. Agrippa's attitude in this field was determined by the Neoplatonic idea that faith (*fides*) and reason (*ratio*) each has its own

³⁰ *Epistolae*, 5, 85, d.d. 13 October 1529, pp. 934–937.

³¹ *Epistolae*, 4, 44, 48, 49, 54 and 73, d.d. September–December 1526, pp. 821–822, 824, 826, 835, 858. In *Epistolae*, 4, 68, d.d. 19 November 1526, p. 852, Agrippa says that he built a cannon shooting red-hot bullets, claiming that this gun was quicker and easier to handle than any other existing gun.

³² See *De incertitudine*, ch. 29, ed. 1531, fol. 42^r; *Opera*, p. 66, where Agrippa mentions that he had begun this work at the time when he was working as a mining manager for Emperor Maximilian ('cum ego ante aliquot annos a Caesarea Maiestate aliquot mineris prefectus essem' [while I served the Emperor, some years ago, as manager of several mines]).

³³ *Epistolae*, 2, 19, d.d. 6 February 1518, pp. 664–669.

³⁴ *Epistolae*, 7, 26, d.d. 11 January 1533, p. 1043.

field of application, and that they must not be at cross-purposes. Hence he was, from his early days, radically opposed to scholastic theology. According to Agrippa, scholastic theology is inherently reprehensible because it treats theology as an Aristotelian science. This Neoplatonic reproach against scholastic theology, which in fact is as old as scholastic theology itself,³⁵ was also voiced in the period immediately preceding Agrippa by such well-known scholars as the Chancellor of the University of Paris, Jean Gerson (1363–1419) and Nicholas of Cusa (1401–1464). Agrippa of course knew the writings of these authors, but there is no indication that he was directly influenced by them. Instead of a rationalistic ('Aristotelian') theology, which aims at proving Biblical truths through deductive reasoning, Agrippa champions a theology which aims, through inductive reasoning, at securing the true meaning of the Word of God. The method of reasoning which Agrippa applied in all his writings in order to practise this theology combines, as we shall see, the comparison of similar Biblical texts (mostly on the level of their allegorical meaning, although the moral sense also enters into the range of Agrippa's interests) and the confirmation of the correct meaning by authors considered to be worthy of authority and approved by the Church.

Agrippa's antagonism to all those who were trained in scholastic thinking runs through his life like an unbroken thread. What kept this antagonism alive was not only Agrippa's consideration that the scholastic method was formally objectionable, but also his feeling that the men who practised it in his own lifetime were arrogant and immoral. The aversion which Agrippa nourished against the scholastic men of learning is well illustrated by a letter from 1530 to the *Parlement* of Malines. In this letter he vindicated his fellow physician magister Johannes Theobaldus, who had been in conflict with the official town physicians of Antwerp. The certified doctors, so we learn from this letter, had left the city during an outburst of plague in the late summer of 1529 (a plague which also killed Agrippa's wife) while at the same time they were defaming Agrippa's friend, who had no degree, but who knew effective methods of treatment and had stayed

³⁵ See, e.g. Grabmann, *Die geschichte der scholastischen Methode*, vol. 1, pp. 215 ff.; Endres, 'Die Dialektiker und ihre Gegner im 11. Jahrhundert,' Hartmann, 'Manegold von Lautenbach und die Anfänge der Frühscholastik,' Kölmel, 'Scolasticus literator,' pp. 301–304, and most recently Lawn, *The Rise and Decline of the Scholastic 'Quaestio disputata'*, pp. 101–107.

in town, risking his own life, to use them at crucial moments.³⁶ Agrippa makes it clear that he is not only defending a man who was suffering from the slander of pompous and incompetent frauds, but he also places, with polemical force, the true, practical art of curing ('ars medendi') above the merely theoretical science of medicine taught by means of the scholastic method in the universities ('illa logistica sive sophistica medicina', p. 944).³⁷ But the field in which Agrippa waged his battle with scholasticism most intensively was that of theology. At various specific moments in his life, he had confrontations with professional theologians or with theologians or clergymen who were trained by them or thought like them (mostly mendicants, and hence usually disparagingly referred to by Agrippa as monks). As we shall see, the three most dramatic conflicts occurred in 1509, when Agrippa was giving lectures at the University of Dôle on Reuchlin's *De verbo mirifico*, in 1518, when Agrippa supported Lefèvre d'Étaple's view concerning the triple marriage of Saint Anne, and in 1530, when the theologians of the University of Louvain condemned a series of passages from *De incertitudine*. In each case, the theologians who opposed Agrippa not only questioned his professional qualifications because he did not practise scholastic theology, but also revealed themselves as aggressive guardians of the status quo in theology, and condemned Agrippa's thoughts as heretical or offensive to pious ears, yet without entering into direct discussion with him. Each time, Agrippa not only refuted in writing the content of the criticism, but also articulated his distress at the very act of criticizing; he felt that the refusal to enter into an open debate and the unilateral condemnation of a fellow theologian as a heretic was morally unacceptable, and formally at variance with the tradition of the Church. Over the years, Agrippa's disagreement with the professional theologians intensified until around 1530, at the time of the conflict over *De incertitudine*; soon thereafter, the effort of the Cologne Inquisition to stop the publication of *De occulta philosophia* led to a totally unbridgeable chasm, which marred his final years.

This study begins (chapter 1) with a brief biographical sketch (brief, because it is unnecessary to duplicate the most recent and generally reliable biography of Agrippa included in the first five chapters of

³⁶ *Epistolae*, 6, 7, d.d. 1530, pp. 943–945.

³⁷ Compare the account, containing similar criticism, of Agrippa's own experience in medicine, in *De incertitudine*, chapter 83 (on practising medicine), ed. 1531, fol. 128^r; *Opera*, pp. 249–250.

Nauert's *Agrippa and the Crisis of Renaissance Thought*, pp. 9–115). This sketch is based on a fresh reading of the complete correspondence, consisting of four hundred and fifty one letters collected in chronological order and published as a part of the *Opera*-editions of the late sixteenth century. The short biography focuses on those facts which reveal how much Agrippa was occupied throughout his lifetime with religion and theology; furthermore, it shows how the controversy with the scholastic theologians runs through Agrippa's entire life.

Chapters 2 and 3 contain first a description of the formal reasons for which Agrippa rejected scholastic theology and of the way in which he articulated his rejection, and secondly a description of the method of scholastic reasoning which he proposed (and practised) as an alternative.

Chapter 4 contains a detailed analysis of the polemic over *De incertitudine*. Both the content of the attack formulated by the Louvain theologians and Agrippa's refutation of their attack in the *Apologia* will be evaluated. In chapter 5, which is closely linked to chapter 4, we shall study in detail several passages from the *Apologia*, in which Agrippa explained to the Louvain theologians the nature and function of his declamation, thus defining his position as a humanistic theologian. In some of these passages Agrippa used statements on the nature and function of the declamation made by Erasmus in his apologies of the *Encomium matrimonii*, a declamation of Erasmus which had also been attacked by a particular Louvain theologian. These Erasmian elements in Agrippa's discourse show that Agrippa endorsed Erasmus as an opponent of the professional theologians and a supporter of both ecclesiastical and theological reform. But our analysis of the relevant passages from Agrippa's apology aims to show especially that Agrippa, following in the footsteps of Erasmus, did not intend to define the declamation as a frivolous writing in which the author irresponsibly takes the liberty of saying anything at all and for the sake of mere confrontation with the dogmatical theologians, but rather as a serious writing in which the author discusses, within the framework of Roman orthodoxy, controversial issues and moral dilemmas. Chapters 4 and 5 thus aim to show how Agrippa used this polemic to present himself in a forceful way as a humanist, and to demonstrate, by means of a significant case study, how the conflict between scholastic and humanistic theologians at the beginning of the sixteenth century resulted from profound differences in outlook and approach.

Finally, chapters 6, 7 and 8 offer detailed analyses of the structure and content of Agrippa's three declamations *De nobilitate et praecellentia foeminei sexus*, *De originali peccato* and *De sacramento matrimonii*. These chapters argue that Agrippa consistently applied in practice the method of reasoning which he advocated as an alternative to the scholastic method of reasoning. Furthermore, it is hoped that they offer some useful material for future scholars who wish to study in greater depth Agrippa's theological and philosophical ideas. The study concludes with a brief survey of the main results and a provisional evaluation of Agrippa's place in the intellectual world of his time.

CHAPTER ONE

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH, WITH EMPHASIS ON AGRIPPA'S INTEREST IN DIVINE STUDIES AND HIS CONFLICTS WITH ANTI-HUMANISTIC THEOLOGIANs

1. *Early life (1486–1509)*

There is not much known about Agrippa's early life. He was born at Cologne in 1486 and spent his early years there.¹ In 1499, he matriculated as a 'minorennis' [person under age] at the University of Cologne, where he received the degree of *magister artium* in 1502.² As an adult, he severely criticized the instruction he had received from two of his instructors in particular, namely the doctors in theology Theodericus de Bomell (or 'Bommelchen', as Agrippa calls him), and Cornelius de Breda.³ He sojourned in Paris in 1507 (perhaps earlier)⁴ and made a journey to Spain in 1508,⁵ although we lack a clear picture of the motives for these journeys. From some unknown

¹ See for Agrippa's birth and early childhood in Cologne e.g. *Epistolae*, 7, 26, d.d. 11 January 1533, p. 1047. The year of his birth is deduced from Agrippa's statement that in 1509 he was 22 years old; see *Defensio*, fol. B vi^r.

² Nauert, pp. 9–10. For the dates of his matriculation, baccalaureate and licentiate see Keussen, *Die Matrikel der Universität Köln*, vol. 2, p. 473. Agrippa mentions his master's degree in *Defensio*, fol. G vi^r: '... qui (i.e., Agrippa) in eo artificio (i.e., dialectic) quondam apud Colonienses sophistas non modico temporis dispendio, ad lauream usque magisteriumque desudavi' [... because I formerly studied with the sophists of Cologne this art assiduously, wasting a considerable amount of time, until the master's degree].

³ *Defensio*, fol. G vi^r; *Epistolae*, 7, 26, d.d. 11 January 1533, p. 1045. See for the two doctors in theology Löhr, *Die theologischen Disputationen und Promotionen an der Universität Köln im ausgehenden 15. Jahrhundert*, p. 23 and p. 27.

⁴ See *Epistolae*, 1, 1–3, d.d. 1507, pp. 593–595. According to Nauert, p. 14 and Jegel, 'Die Lebenstragödie des Dr. jur. et med. Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim', p. 28, Agrippa was a student in Paris, while Morley, vol. 1, p. 23, assumes he went there on a diplomatic mission. Meiners, *Lebensbeschreibungen berühmter Männer aus den Zeiten der Wiederherstellung der Wissenschaften*, vol. 1, p. 217, argued that Agrippa went to Paris already at the age of 17 (i.e., 1504), because in *Epistolae*, 3, 40, d.d. 27 April 1523, pp. 749–750, Agrippa wrote that he had known a certain Frenchman for 20 years. Agrippa's salutation to a Paris friend in *Epistolae*, 1, 2, d.d. 23 May 1507, p. 594, indeed suggests that he had been in Paris earlier than 1507; cp. Jegel, p. 28.

⁵ *Epistolae*, 1, 4–10 (specially 10), d.d. 1508–24 January 1509, pp. 595–611.

date, Agrippa was, following in the footsteps of his ancestors, in the service of emperor Maximilian I, first as a minor secretary, and later, for seven years, as a soldier in Italy.⁶ The study of *res arcanae* (or *secreta*) dominated Agrippa's life from an early age. In his letter to Trithemius, dated late 1509 or early 1510, Agrippa wrote that he had been a keen explorer of the mysterious forces in nature from his early boyhood.⁷ Together with friends who shared his interests, he formed some kind of secret society.⁸ To this end, he swore an oath of secrecy which he kept his entire life, and it prevented him from writing too freely about alchemy in *De incertitudine*, which he composed in 1526.⁹

Agrippa must have begun drafting his great survey of occult philosophy at a very early stage, because already at the end of 1509 or the beginning of 1510 he offered the complete manuscript of *De occulta philosophia* to the Abbot of Spanheim, Johannes Trithemius. Shortly before the completion of the work, Agrippa had visited Trithemius in his monastery Spanheim. The abbot read Agrippa's work with approval and encouraged him to continue his occult studies.¹⁰ The completion of *De occulta philosophia* in 1509/1510 did not bring on the conclusion of Agrippa's activities in this field. To the contrary, although the work was not immediately published in print, and cir-

⁶ *Epistolae*, 6, 18, d.d. 12 May 1531, p. 957: 'Proinde et pater et avi et atavi et tritavi Caesarum Romanorum Austriacorumque Principum a longo aevo ministri fuerunt. Horum vestigia et ego insecutus, divo Maximiliano Caesari et pace et bello non segniter inservivi' [My father and my ancestors of one, two and three generations ago were by tradition in the service of the Roman Emperors and the Austrian monarchs. I followed in their steps and have served with enthusiasm Emperor Maximilian both in peace and in wartime]. *Epistolae*, 7, 21, n.d., p. 1021: 'Maximiliano Caesari a prima aetate destinatus aliquandiu illi a minoribus secretis fui, deinde in Italicis castris septennio illius stipendio militavi' [Appointed to the service of Maximilian from my early days onward, I first worked for him for a while as a minor secretary, and next I served him for seven years as a soldier in Italy].

⁷ *Epistolae*, 1, 23, n.d., p. 622; *De occulta philosophia*, ed. Perrone Compagni, p. 70, lines 22–25: '... ego ... qui ab ineunte aetate semper circa mirabilium effectuum et plenas mysteriorum operationes curiosus intrepidusque extiti explorator' [I, who from childhood onward have been an attentive and steadfast explorer of the operations dealing with the miraculous forces, which are full of mysteries]. Translation of this letter in Orsier, *Henri Cornélis Agrippa*, pp. 57–58.

⁸ See Nauert, pp. 17–20.

⁹ 'Permulta adhuc de hac arte (mihi tamen non admodum inimica) dicere possem, nisi iuratum esset (quod facere solent, qui mysteriis initiantur) de silentio' [I could say many more additional things about this art (i.e., alchemy), (for I am not at all ill-disposed toward it), had I not sworn an oath of silence, as those who are initiated into secrets are wont to do] (*De incertitudine*, ed. 1531, fol. 135; *Opera*, p. 265).

¹⁰ *Epistolae*, 1, 24, d.d. 8 April 1510, pp. 623–633.

culated in manuscript for many years,¹¹ Agrippa kept revising it. When he fled in haste from his domicile in Pavia in late 1515 or early 1516, after the French had reconquered the district of Milan by their victory in the battle of Marignano, he was forced to leave behind several manuscripts containing work in progress, among which were unfinished notes on *De occulta philosophia*.¹² In 1524 he sent an index of the latest version of his work to his Metz friend Brennonius, but, as he points out, he was still working on it.¹³ Three years later, Agrippa reported in a letter to a new friend in Antwerp, the Augustinian friar Aurelius ab Aquapendente, that the book was circulating in an unfinished state.¹⁴ This constituted, as the letter suggests, a strong motive for preparing the work for publication.¹⁵ It nonetheless took until 1531 for the first edition of a part of *De occulta philosophia* to be published.

2. Dôle and London (1509–1510)

In 1509, Agrippa started what would turn out to be an irregular and overall not very successful career as a university professor in philosophy and theology. Agrippa's interests in this field date from earlier than 1509, however. To be precise, they must go back, like his interest in

¹¹ See, e.g., *Epistolae*, 3, 33, d.d. 7 October 1522, p. 743, and 5, 14, d.d. 24 September 1527, pp. 873–875.

¹² 'Item commentaria sed adhuc indigesta in libros nostros de occulta philosophia' [Likewise (i.e., I lost) still unfinished notes on my books dealing with occult philosophy] (*Epistolae*, 2, 14, d.d. 1518, p. 660).

¹³ 'Indicem librorum meorum De occulta philosophia, quem librum quondam adhuc adolescens edidi, postea multis capitibus auxi, proximis his diebus ad te misi-mus; sed est adhuc aliquid, quod additurus sum' [In the past few days I sent you an index to my books on occult philosophy, a work which I published a long time ago when I was still a young man, and to which I later added many chapters. There are still things which I want to add to it now] (*Epistolae*, 3, 56, d.d. 22 January 1524, p. 759).

¹⁴ 'Qui vero penes vos circumferuntur libri adolescentiae meae de Occulta philosophia intitulati, horum priores duo in multis deficiunt: tertius totus mancus est, nec nisi scriptorum meorum epitoma quoddam continet' [Yet of the books on occult philosophy, written in my youth, which are circulating in your country (i.e., in the Low Countries), the first two are incomplete in many respects; the third book is completely defective and contains only a summary of my writings] (*Epistolae*, 5, 14, d.d. 24 September 1527, p. 875).

¹⁵ 'Sed ego totum opus, favente Domino, integrum recognitumque aliquando in lucem dabo . . .' [But one day, with the help of God, I will publish the entire writing, in a complete and revised edition] (*ibid.*).

occultism, to the earliest years of his intellectual activity. From a letter to him written by a friend (possibly Theodericus Wichwael de Caster, prior of the Augustinian monastery in Cologne),¹⁶ it appears that during his journeys abroad in 1507 and 1508 Agrippa had been studying and excerpting manuscripts containing philosophical writings and commentaries on the Bible.¹⁷ Agrippa's first appearance as a university professor was at the University of Dôle in Burgundy, where he gave public lectures on Reuchlin's *De verbo mirifico*, in honor of the daughter of Emperor Maximilian, Margaret, Princess of Austria and Burgundy.¹⁸ On the strength of these lectures he received a doctorate in theology from this university.¹⁹

During this same year Agrippa began to write (and possibly completed) the treatise *De nobilitate et praecellentia foeminei sexus* [On the nobility and excellence of the feminine sex], also in honor of Margaret of Austria. In this treatise, Agrippa opposes traditional Christian misogyny on theological and historical grounds. It was published all of twenty years later, when Agrippa, then living in Antwerp, found the time to publish a number of his smaller writings in one volume, which we will call henceforth the *Collected Treatises*.²⁰ In this edition,

¹⁶ See on this friend of Agrippa, who was, like him, an opponent of the conservative forces in the Church, Kunzelmann, *Geschichte der deutschen Augustiner-Eremiten. Vierter Teil*, pp. 47–48, note 173 and Meuthen, *Kölner Universitätsgeschichte. Band I*, pp. 161–162. Wichwael was also titular bishop of Cyrene (in Lybia) and suffragan bishop of Cologne.

¹⁷ *Epistolae*, 1, 22, d.d. 23 November (the day of Saint Clement) 1509, p. 619.

¹⁸ 'Christiani doctoris Ioannis Reuchlinii Phorcensis christianum atque catholicum librum De verbo mirifico inscriptum multo labore et vigiliis exposui, non clancularie per cubicula, sed in scholis publicis, auditorio publico, publicis praelectionibus, quas ad honorem illustrissimae principis Margarethae et unici studii Dolani feci gratis' [I have explained with great and time-consuming effort the Christian, Catholic writing 'On the wonder-working word' by the Christian doctor Johann Reuchlin of Pforzheim, not secretly in back rooms, but in a public lecture hall, in the presence of an audience, during public lectures which I taught without recompense to honor the most illustrious princess Margaret and the distinguished university of Dôle] (*Expostulatio*, fol. D 2^v; *Opera*, p. 494).

¹⁹ '... In Dola Burgundiae publica lectura sacras literas professus sum, ob quam ab huius studii doctoribus in collegium receptus, insuper regentia et stipendiis donatus sum' [In the Burgundian town of Dôle I taught theology in a public course, on account of which I received a doctorate from that university, and also a professorship and an income] (*Defensio*, fol. B vi^r). From this, it appears that he also received a financial reward, but in the passage quoted above in note 18 Agrippa mentions that he gave the course gratis (*Expostulatio*, fol. D 2^v; *Opera*, p. 494).

²⁰ *Collected Treatises*, fols. A 4^r–C 8^v; *Opera*, pp. 499–535. In addition to the dedicatory epistle to Margaret of Austria, Agrippa dedicated the treatise to a friend and patron of that time, the advisor of the Emperor, Maximilianus Transsylvanus; the two letters are printed in succession, fols. A ij^r–A 4^r; pp. 499–503. See on Trans-

the treatise was labelled as a declamation (although Agrippa himself never referred, either before or after the publication, to the treatise as a declamation).²¹

Agrippa's success in Dôle was ruined by the suspicion of heresy which was raised against his public lectures by Jean Catilinet, the provincial superior of the Franciscans for Burgundy. During a Lenten sermon, delivered in the presence of Margaret of Austria at the Burgundian court of the Low Countries in Ghent, Catilinet had attacked Agrippa violently by calling him a 'judaising heretic.' This was the first time that Agrippa was publicly accused, behind his back and thus without the chance to defend himself, of the dangerous crime of heresy:

Nam inter cetera vocasti me in tanto conventu semel atque iterum haereticum Iudaisantem, qui in Christianas scholas induxerim scelestissimam, damnatam ac prohibitam cabalae artem, qui contemptis sanctis patribus et catholicis doctoribus praeferam rabinos Iudaeorum, contorqueam sacras literas ad artes haereticas et thalmud Iudaeorum. (*Collected Treatises*, fols. D 2^{r-v}; *Opera*, p. 494)

For, among other things, you called me in the presence of these important people several times a judaising heretic, because I allegedly introduced into Christian teaching the extremely punishable, condemned and prohibited art of cabbala, and prefer the Jewish rabbis to the Church Fathers and the Christian theologians, whom I allegedly hold in contempt, and accommodate Holy Scripture to heretical arts and the Jewish Talmud.

As Agrippa recorded in the *Expostulatio*, the allegations made him an outcast, and he soon left Dôle. He went to London, from where he wrote a letter to Catilinet, which was published, under the title of *Expostulatio*, in the *Collected Treatises* of 1529.²² In this letter (dated 1510), Agrippa defended himself with arguments which illustrate in a characteristic manner how profoundly his way of thinking and operating in theology differed from that of his opponents. A brief

sylvanus Roersch, 'Maximilien Transsylvanus, humaniste et secrétaire de Charles-Quint' and 'Nouvelles indications concernant Maximilien Transsylvanus.'

²¹ The word 'declamatio' does not appear on the title page of the edition, but is included in the title of the treatise at fol. A 4^r; hence also *Opera*, p. 504.

²² *Expostulatio cum Ioanne Catilineti super expositionem libri Ioannis Capimionis de verbo mirifico*, in *Collected Treatises*, fols. D 1^r-D 5^v; *Opera*, pp. 492-498. Synopsis in Prost, vol. 1, pp. 182-186; translation in Morley, vol. 1, pp. 240-249.

look at this letter will be useful, because it displays a line of defense and a use of arguments which will recur in his later polemics, and which it is essential to grasp if we are to understand his attitude as a declaimer.

In his appeal to Catilinet, which, like all of Agrippa's writings, is full of Biblical quotations and references, Agrippa first stressed that he was an upright member of the Church. He acknowledged the possibility that his lectures contained doctrinal errors, and stated his readiness to revoke these errors, should he be convinced of their existence. This statement functions not only as a defense, but also as the starting point for a strong counter-attack. Agrippa indeed pointed out that Catilinet had acted in contravention of the traditional procedure in such cases and had offended Christian decency by slandering Agrippa behind his back and calling him a heretic without confronting him openly. As a result, Agrippa did not get the chance to defend his opinion or, should his defense prove to be untenable, to revoke his error. Things were made worse, Agrippa argued, because Catilinet had formulated his accusation in a sermon, the form of discourse meant *par excellence* to lead people to the practice of Christian virtues.

As to the actual charges of Catilinet, Agrippa stressed that Reuchlin's *De verbo mirifico* does not go against the official teaching of Rome, and, in general, that it is possible to appreciate in a positive way the learned tradition of the Jews without betraying Christianity. Agrippa also specifically stated that he had esteem for the works of the Jewish rabbis, but without disavowing his own Christianity.²³ In the following chapter, we shall discuss a passage from book two of *De verbo mirifico*, which illustrates in what way Agrippa perceived the usefulness of Jewish scholarship for Christian Bible studies.

In spite of the criticism directed to Catilinet, the letter concludes on a very mild, subdued and conciliatory note. This is quite noteworthy, because in his later conflicts with conservative churchmen, Agrippa struck an increasingly hostile note, until he himself could only see the faults in his opponents. Thus, the bitterness which Agrippa developed over the years as a result of the contemptible treatment

²³ 'Verum ego Christianus sum, nec mors, nec vita, separabit me a fide Christi, Christianosque doctores omnibus praefero, tamen Iudaeorum rabinos non contemno, . . .' [But I am a Christian, and death nor life shall separate me from my faith in Christ, and I prefer the Christian doctors to all other scholars, and yet I do not despise the Jewish rabbis] (*Expostulatio*, fol. D 2^v; *Opera*, p. 494).

he received from his opponents gradually found its way into his writings.

Agrippa had gone to London for what he himself called somewhat mysteriously a secret affair. More importantly, he also studied Scripture with John Colet, specifically the Epistles of St. Paul.²⁴ We know that in the following years he was indeed working on a commentary of the Epistle to the Romans. Like his unfinished notes on *De occulta philosophia*, Agrippa left the commentary, which covered chapters 1–6, in Pavia, when he had to escape in late 1515 or early 1516. These manuscripts were retrieved and kept safely by a student of Agrippa with whom he was occasionally in touch, but it is not known whether this student actually returned the unfinished commentary on the Epistle to the Romans to Agrippa. It is lost or at least hidden today.²⁵

After his return from London to Cologne, Agrippa declaimed at the Faculty of Theology some quodlibetical disputations on various topics dealing with religious practices in the contemporary church. Nothing of these disputations is extant. K. Nowotny has plausibly suggested that Agrippa incorporated their substance into chapter 56 of *De incertitudine*, entitled 'On religion in general.'²⁶

²⁴ 'Anno autem sequenti, in Britanniam traiciens, apud Ioannem Coletum catholicae doctrinae eruditissimum, integerrimaeque vitae virum, in divi Pauli epistulas desudavi, et quae nescivi illo docente multa didici, quamvis apud Britannos longe aliud et occultissimum quoddam tunc agebam negotium' [Crossing over to Britain in the following year, I studied the letters of Saint Paul with John Colet, a man equipped with superb knowledge of Catholic learning and leading a most upright life. Under his guidance I learned many things which I did not know, although I was in Britain for a completely different, and most secret purpose] (*Defensio*, fols. B vi^{r-v}).

²⁵ The commentary is mentioned in *Epistolae*, 2, 14, d.d. 1518, p. 660; 2, 33, d.d. 2 June 1519, p. 681; 2, 37, n.d., p. 684; 3, 40, d.d. 27 April 1523, p. 750. See *Epistolae*, 1, 49, n.d., p. 638, on the flight from Pavia.

²⁶ *De occulta philosophia*, ed. Nowotny, Einleitung, p. 399. Agrippa mentions the subject of the disputations in chapter 56 of *De incertitudine*: 'Nos hic de religione loquimur, quantum ad eas artes, quae ad sacerdotum quaestum, et ad rempublicam suis simulachris, statuis, imaginibus, templis, phanis, sacellis, fastis, pompis et sacerdotiorum magistratibus ornandam attinet, de quibus alibi inter placita theologica anno millesimo quingentesimo decimo per me Coloniae declamata amplo sermone disputavi' [In this chapter I am speaking about religion, insofar as it is concerned with the arts dealing with the income of priests and with the adorning of the state with suitable effigies, statues, portraits, churches, sanctuaries, chapels, feast days, processions, and official functions of priests. I have debated these things at length elsewhere, among the theological opinions which I declaimed in 1510 at Cologne] (ed. 1531, fol. 73^r; *Opera*, p. 133). Agrippa also mentions the Cologne disputation in the *Defensio* (fol. B vi^r): 'Theologica placita (quae vos vocabulo non admodum latino, quodlibeta dicitis)' [Theological opinions, which you (i.e., the scholastic theologians) call with a completely incorrect Latin word quodlibetical disputations]. The collection

3. Italian period (1511–1518)

In the course of 1511 Agrippa went to Northern Italy, where he stayed, except for a few brief interludes,²⁷ until the beginning of 1518. At this time Northern Italy went through a very turbulent period as a result of the French-Italian wars, and Agrippa participated in and was otherwise affected by the frequent military operations which were then taking place.

Notwithstanding his participation in military operations on the side of the Emperor, Agrippa was also constantly engaged in both occult and divine studies. At some time between the fall of 1511 and the beginning of 1512 he visited the schismatic Council of Pisa. The letter which was required to reconcile him with Rome is still extant.²⁸ In 1512, Agrippa was at Pavia for a short time as a lecturer at the university, where, as Morley suggests, he possibly taught a course on Plato's *Symposium*.²⁹ This hypothesis is plausible, because the first of the ten orations in the 1535 collection of Agrippa's orations is an undated lecture on Plato's *Symposium* (it contains a praise of Neoplatonic love), which could very well be the inaugural lecture for an academic course. If we assume that the editor of the *Collected Orations* (perhaps Agrippa himself) arranged the orations in chronological sequence, the lecture on the *Symposium* must be older than the second lecture, on the *Pimander*, which certainly dates from 1515.³⁰

Agrippa's stay at Pavia was interrupted as a result of the unrest caused by the collapse of French power in the region of Lombardy.³¹ In 1515 he was in Pavia for the second time, now teaching a course on the *Pimander*, the first dialogue in the *Corpus Hermeticum*. His inaugural lecture, mentioned above, bears the title *De potestate et sapientia*

of Cologne theological disputations published by Löhr, *Die theologischen Disputationen und Promotionen an der Universität Köln im ausgehenden 15. Jahrhundert*, contains no mention of Agrippa's disputations.

²⁷ In 1514 he made a trip to Switzerland; see *Epistolae*, 1, 40, d.d. 15 March 1514, p. 632. Later in 1514 and early 1515 he visited Southern Italy; see, e.g., *Epistolae*, 1, 46, d.d. 5 February 1515, pp. 636–637, written from Brindisi.

²⁸ *Epistolae*, 1, 38, p. 631. The letter was written on July 12, 1513 by Pietro Bembo, secretary of the newly elected Pope Leo X. See for the chronology Nauert, p. 38.

²⁹ Morley, vol. 1, p. 261.

³⁰ *Oratio in Praelectionem Convivii Platonis, Amoris laudem continens; Oratio I* in *Collected Orations*, fols. A ii^r–B iii^r; *Opera*, pp. 1074–1088. See also Perrone Compagni in the introduction to her edition of *De occulta philosophia*, p. 4, note 9.

³¹ Nauert, p. 39.

Dei [On the power and wisdom of God]. We shall deal with this text in detail in chapter 2 below.³²

During this period, Agrippa also wrote the *Dialogus de homine* [Dialogue on the Human Race], which was never published during his lifetime and which only survives in fragmentary state. This dialogue constitutes an analysis of the anthropological concepts in Pico's *Hep-taplus*. In the dedicatory letter to Agrippa's patron at that time, Guglielmo Paleologo (1494–1518), Marquis of Monferrato, Agrippa states that the dialogue constitutes a digest of his notes taken for the Pavia course.³³ Like Agrippa's first sojourn at Pavia, the second stay was interrupted in an untimely manner, this time as a result of the recovery of power by the French, thanks to Francis's victory over the Swiss and the Imperial troops at Marignano. Leaving everything behind, Agrippa fled Pavia in haste in the company of his wife, a woman from Pavia whom he had recently married, and their child.

After both his first and second stay in Pavia, Agrippa lived some time in Casale as the guest of his above mentioned patron, Guglielmo Paleologo. In 1516, Agrippa dedicated to Paleologo another work, namely the *Liber* (or *Sermo*, as Agrippa called it once) *de triplici ratione cognoscendi Deum* [Book (Lecture) on the three ways to learn to know God], in six chapters.³⁴ Agrippa dedicated this work and the *Dialogus de homine* to the same person because, as he explained in the dedicatory

³² *Oratio, habita Papiae in praelectione Hermetis Trismegisti, de potestate et sapientia Dei; Oratio II* in *Collected Orations*, fols. B iii^v–C iii^r; *Opera*, pp. 1089–1101. This is the only one of the ten surviving orations to be provided with a date (1515).

³³ 'Illud praeterea excellentiam tuam scire cupio, quia multa adhuc circa ea, quae in hac collatione dicuntur, dicenda supersunt, quae ipse mihi libenter transire constitui, ne confabulandi dialogique consuetudinem scriptis excedere videar: copiosius autem, quae hic deficiunt, in annotationibus nostris super Pimandrum Trismegisti mox comperies elucidata' [But I want your eminence to know that many things concerning the topic discussed in this colloquy remain to be said, which I willingly decided to leave aside, lest I gave the impression of exceeding the limit imposed by custom on a conversation written in the form of a dialogue. Soon however, you will find the things which are missing here discussed at greater length in my annotations on the *Pimander* of Hermes Trismegistus] (*Epistolae*, 1, 51, n.d., p. 641). The *Annotationes super Pimandrum Trismegistri* never appeared in print and are lost today. The fragment of the dialogue *De homine* which survived was published for the first time by Zambelli in *Rivista critica della filosofia* 13 (1958). Perrone Compagni suggests in the introduction to her edition of *De occulta philosophia*, p. 4, note 10, that the dialogue was never more than a provisional draft, and was later cannibalized for fragmentary use in other works.

³⁴ First edition in the *Collected Treatises*, fols. F 2^v–H 4^v; *Opera*, pp. 452–481. Chapters 2, 3, 4 and a part of 5 were edited with notes by Zambelli in: Garin et al., eds., *Testi umanistici sull'ermetismo*, pp. 146–162. The dedicatory letter is also printed as *Epistolae*, 1, 52, d.d. 1516, pp. 641–643.

epistle of *De triplici ratione cognoscendi Deum*, the two works display affinities as to their content. *De triplici ratione cognoscendi Deum* was published in the *Collected Treatises* of 1529. We shall also return to this work in detail in chapter 2.

During this period, Agrippa possibly wrote the first version of the *Dehortatio gentilis theologiae* [A dissuasion against pagan theology].³⁵ We shall take a brief look at this short writing, because it has evoked very mixed reactions among scholars: Morley believed it has a certain depth of meaning, while Nauert feels it is marked by pessimism and fideism, and K. Goldammer was struck by what he calls its crude declamatory rhetoric ('teilweise platte deklamatorische Rhetorik').³⁶ Although the work is undated, two things lead to the hypothesis that it might have been written in the Italian period. First, Agrippa wrote in 1526 that he had had the *Dehortatio gentilis theologiae* in his portfolio for some time already. In that year, he slightly reworked it and dedicated it as a sign of gratitude to Symphorien Bullioud, Bishop of Bazas, who was then acting as mediator between Agrippa and the French Queen Mother, mainly concerning the payment of Agrippa's overdue salary.³⁷ Secondly, typographical details in the *Collected Treatises* seem to suggest that the *Dehortatio gentilis theologiae* must be read as a sort of seventh chapter or an appendix to the treatise on the three ways to know God,³⁸ and this perhaps means that not only is the content of the two works related, but also that they both belong to the Italian period.

The *Dehortatio gentilis theologiae* contains the written version, cast in a rather lively style, of a convivial talk which Agrippa had given to some friends a few years after he had taught his course on the *Pimander* (the full title is *Dehortatio gentilis theologiae, ad amicos aliquos quondam perorata*). As such, it is comparable to the informal lectures to a group of friends which Agrippa used to give (e.g. in Metz, where, as we shall see, he gave lectures to the friars of the Celestine monastery). Two other such informal lectures survive in print, about which we shall say more

³⁵ *Collected Treatises*, fols. H 5^r–I 2^v; *Opera*, pp. 482–491.

³⁶ Morley, vol. 2, p. 131. Nauert, p. 98. Goldammer in *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, vol. 2 (1978), p. 120.

³⁷ *Epistolae*, 4, 15, d.d. 10 June 1526, pp. 794–795.

³⁸ The text is printed immediately after the *Liber de triplici ratione cognoscendi Deum*, and two of the running headers of the text of the *Dehortatio gentilis theologiae*, fols. H 8^r and I 1^r, bear the mention 'DE COGNO(S). DEO.' After the end of the *Dehortatio gentilis theologiae*, 3 distichs appear bearing the title 'In libellum de triplici ratione cognoscendi Deum'; the distichs are not printed in the *Opera*.

below. In the *Dehortatio gentilis theologiae* Agrippa warns his friends, who have asked him to explain the *Pimander* to them, not to focus exclusively on the Hermetic writings to the detriment of Holy Scripture. He is clearly worried that his friends might go too far in their enthusiasm for the pagan philosophical texts and forget their responsibility as Christians, but he by no means advises them to abandon the study of the Hermetic texts altogether. In fact, he emphasizes that if his friends incorporate the Hermetic writings into their Biblical exegesis (Agrippa uses the expressive formulation 'to clean up the pagan literature until it fits into Christian learning') and thus enrich Christianity, then the study of those pagan texts must not be condemned, but rather greatly appreciated. Agrippa sums up his thesis in a very positive manner as follows:

Si haec facere poteritis et ethnicorum literas repurgatas ad Christianam eruditionem transtuleritis et ab Aegyptiis tanquam iniustis possessoribus opima spolia vel clanculum surripientes, illorumque opibus ditati, ecclesiam Dei locupletaveritis, iam non admodum dissuadeo, sed consulo vobis ethnicam literaturam. (*Collected Treatises*, fol. I 1^v; *Opera*, pp. 489–490)

If you can do that and transfer the cleansed writings of the pagans to Christian learning; if, by taking away secretly, so to speak, the rich spoils from their illegal possessors, the Egyptians, and by elevating yourselves with their riches, you enrich the Church of God, then I no longer advise against pagan literature, but I recommend it to you.

In short, it is clear that this treatise does not demonstrate any change in Agrippa's psychological mood or intellectual attitude, but rather confirms the theological position which he was always to take, namely that all sacred texts from the Hermetic tradition are, like Hebrew theology, valuable sources which can be put to good use in Christian theology.³⁹

At the end of his stay in Italy Agrippa was in Turin, where he delivered lectures at the University on a theological topic, more specifically on the Bible.⁴⁰ Nothing is known about the content of this course, and the correspondence contains no letters to document this phase

³⁹ See also Perrone Compagni's remarks in *De occulta philosophia*, introduction, p. 7, note 18.

⁴⁰ 'Porro apud Taurinum gymnasium Theologica lectione in publicis scholis sacras literas interpretatus sum' [Furthermore, I taught sacred letters in a public course in theology at the University of Turin] (*Defensio*, fol. B vi^v).

of his life. The Turin lectures were Agrippa's last performance as a University professor.

The *Collected Orations* contain another, third, academic speech written on behalf of a student who was taking a doctorate in law (*Oratio pro quodam doctorando*),⁴¹ which is printed after the Pavia lecture and the lecture on Neoplatonic love, and before the four speeches delivered during the Metz period. Therefore, if we assume that the ten orations in the collection are presented in chronological order, this third academic lecture must have been written during the last part of Agrippa's stay in Italy. The lecture deals with justice and law, and their opposites, and contains many references to legal source texts. It must therefore be added to the evidence attesting Agrippa's thorough legal knowledge.⁴²

4. Metz, Cologne, Geneva and Freiburg (1518–1523)

At the beginning of 1518, after a brief relationship with the court of Charles III (1490–1527), Duke of Savoy, who was the first military officer ('connétable') of King Francis I,⁴³ and a protracted search

⁴¹ It appears from the prooemium that the student was taking a degree in the Faculty of Law: 'De iustitia et iure, illorum contrariis, de utrorumque administratione, meritis simul et demeritis dicemus, ut in qua facultate coronam hodie accipio, quid ego meminero receptae a doctoribus meis bonae disciplinae, quae insuper illius docendi exercendique sit mihi voluntas, quae premiorum spes, palam dinoscatis' [We shall discuss justice and law, their opposites, their application, as well as their merits and demerits, in order that you may openly learn in which Faculty I today accept the honor (i.e., the degree), what I remember from the learned instruction which I received in this worthy field, how much I want to teach it and to practise it, and what my hopes for recompense are] (*Collected Orations*, fol. C iiiiv; *Opera*, p. 1102).

⁴² See Nauert, p. 11, note 7. This speech should be added to the record of circumstantial evidence listed by Nauert to document that Agrippa had a degree in both civil and canon law, although it is unknown where he received this degree; Nauert, p. 10 and note 6, *contra* Prost, vol. 2, p. 72 and Appendice, note 6, pp. 444–448.

⁴³ *Epistolae*, 2, 6, d.d. 3 August (1517), pp. 649–650. From *Epistolae*, 2, 11, d.d. 16 January (1518), p. 655, it appears that Agrippa had written and put into circulation an oration in praise of the Duke of Savoy, but this oration does not survive: 'Caeterum peto a te, audacius forte, sed id maximum sane in modum efflagito, ut pro mea in te incredibili observantia et caritate eo me dones orationis tomo, quem in laudem ducis nostri edidisti' [Moreover I ask you (i.e. Agrippa) perhaps all too audaciously, but nonetheless my request is most insistent, that you send me, by virtue of my incredible friendship and love for you, the volume containing the speech in praise of our duke, which you have published]. See on Charles III Pitts, *The Man who Sacked Rome: Charles de Bourbon, constable of France (1490–1527)*.

for a better employer,⁴⁴ Agrippa took up a position as a travelling ambassador and legal adviser ('advocatus, syndicus et orator') in the service of the free imperial city of Metz.⁴⁵

Although Agrippa no longer occupied an academic position, he remained very actively engaged in theological investigation. Two letters from this period to his old friend Theodorichus Wichwael, who died in 1519, suggest that Agrippa considered his return to the North and his settlement in Metz as an act of spiritual recollection and the occasion to devote himself completely to the study of the Bible.⁴⁶ (One of these letters contains the single reference, discussed above in the Introduction, to the idea that the study of nature and the Bible do not go together.) The correspondence covering the Metz period indeed illustrates how Agrippa was actively involved in Biblical studies and spiritual meditation. What is more, the correspondence shows that from this period on, Agrippa became increasingly interested in the debates over theological and religious issues which were developing with ever greater ferocity between those who advocated reform in the Church and those who wanted to avoid change, seemingly at all costs. As far as it is clear from Agrippa's private correspondence and published treatises, he invariably took a very critical attitude toward conservative churchmen who wished to block reform, but at the same he never favored an attitude that could lead to a schism in the Church.

During these years, Agrippa began several new friendships which left many echoes in his correspondence. With Jean Rogier, alias Brennonius, pastor of the parish of Ste Croix, he shared his passion for occult studies and theology. After he left Metz, he exchanged a number of letters with Brennonius. These letters deal, apart from the usual matters which occur in personal correspondence, with the quarrel over the triple marriage of Saint Anne and the famous witch trial, about which more below. Also, the letters of Agrippa and Brennonius frequently mention occult matters and books on occult matters.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ *Epistolae*, 2, 8–10, 13 August–16 November (1517), pp. 650–654.

⁴⁵ Four speeches survive which Agrippa delivered as a spokesman for Metz, namely his lecture upon acceptance of the post, a speech directed to the Senate of Luxembourg, and two speeches of welcome, one for a certain prince-bishop and the other for a prominent lord (*Orationes IV–VII* in *Collected Orations*, fols. C viii^v–D v^r). *Epistolae*, 2, 11, d.d. 16 January (1518), p. 654, mentions that Agrippa had arrived in Metz.

⁴⁶ *Epistolae*, 2, 17, n.d., and 19, d.d. 6 February 1518; *Opera*, pp. 662 and 665.

⁴⁷ *Epistolae*, 2, 43–47; 49; 50–57; 59; 61; 3, 5–6; 8; 60–62; 4, 20; 26; 27, d.d.

Another new friend was the son of a local dignitary, Claude Chan-sonette (Cantiuncula, d. 1560), who was completing during this time his law study in Basel and who would soon become a well-known lawyer. Agrippa provided medical treatment for Cantiuncula's mother, who was chronically ill.⁴⁸ Agrippa and Cantiuncula exchanged numerous letters between 1518 and 1525, in which they discussed, among other things, current Church affairs, and exchanged theological books, for instance some by Erasmus and Luther.⁴⁹ In his two first letters to Cantiuncula, Agrippa formulated a detailed plan of study for the law student. These letters, and one other letter containing a plan of study for an unnamed young man, yield interesting information concerning Agrippa's attitude toward the humanistic arts curriculum.⁵⁰ From these letters, it appears that Agrippa was a strong supporter of the *studia humanitatis*, which aims, as Agrippa put it himself, at the attainment of *recte sapere* and *eleganter dicere*.⁵¹ More specifically, he urged the young men to acquire an encyclopedic knowledge, rather than specialisation in one field. He also stressed, as did many other humanists, the importance of learning Greek as a part of the acquisition of erudition.⁵² Realizing that it is necessary, in practice, to limit

February 1520–July 1526, pp. 693–699; 702–704; 705–714; 715–717; 719–720; 722–723; 724–725; 765–767; 799–800; 805–807.

⁴⁸ This appears from *Epistolae*, 2, 58, d.d. 22 July 1520, pp. 714–715, written by Cantiuncula after Agrippa's departure from Metz. See also Appendix 2 below.

⁴⁹ For the exchange of books by Luther and Erasmus: *Epistolae*, 2, 26, d.d. 1519, pp. 674–675; *Epistolae*, 2, 32, d.d. 23 May 1519, p. 680; *Epistolae*, 2, 34, d.d. 29 August 1519, pp. 681–682; *Epistolae*, 2, 41, d.d. 25 October 1519, pp. 691–692; *Epistolae*, 3, 23, d.d. 20 September 1522, p. 735; *Epistolae*, 3, 45, d.d. 12 September 1524, pp. 752–753; *Epistolae*, 3, 71, d.d. 27 May 1525, pp. 773–774. The letters from Cantiuncula to Agrippa were reprinted by Kisch, *Gestalten und Probleme aus Humanismus und Jurisprudenz. Neue Studien und Texte*, pp. 314–320; pp. 303–306 offer a brief synopsis of the Agrippa–Cantiuncula correspondence. The letters from Agrippa to Cantiuncula were reprinted by Kisch, *Claudius Cantiuncula*, pp. 290–305; see also Appendix 2 below.

⁵⁰ The two letters to Cantiuncula: *Epistolae*, 2, 12 and 14, d.d. 13 June 1518 and 1518, pp. 655–656; pp. 658–661. The third letter is *Epistolae*, 3, 31, d.d. 5 November 1522, pp. 740–742. To these letters should be added *Epistolae*, 6, 4, n.d. (1530), pp. 940–942, in which Agrippa champions humanist historiography.

⁵¹ *Epistolae*, 3, 31, p. 741.

⁵² 'Neque vero magnum est, in uno solo artificio doctum esse, vel quantumcunque etiam excellere (. . .) sed tanto quisque doctior erit, quanto nescierit pauciora; hortorque, quo te divinitas ingenio donavit et amplo et sublimi, idipsum tibi non paucis, nec humilibus, sed omnibus et altissimis quibusque disciplinis viriliter esse occupandum' [And it is not so important to be learned in just one skill, nor even to reach a maximum of excellence in it (. . .) But the fewer things each person will ignore, the more learned will he be, and I urge you to use courageously the large and distinguished intelligence which God has given you to study not a few and not the humble

oneself to a restricted program of reading, Agrippa advised them to read in particular two authors who would suffice, in his view, to make any man learned in all fields and both languages, namely Pliny the Elder in Latin and Plutarch in Greek. Yet Agrippa stresses that Scripture is even more important than human science:

Hi duo [i.e., Pliny and Plutarch] prae caeteris sufficiunt ad reddendum hominem in omni scientiarum genere utraque lingua doctissimum, nisi quod sacras literas tibi consulo omnibus anteponendas, sine quibus omne reliquum studium tuum vanum erit, et forte etiam noxium. Omne enim, quod ex fide non est, peccatum est: et quod cum Christo non est, contra illum est. (*Epistolae*, 3, 31, d.d. 7 October 1522, p. 742)

These two authors (that is, Pliny and Plutarch) are sufficient to make a man most learned in every branch of science, both in Greek and Latin. But I advise you to place Holy Writ ahead of all other writings. Without it, all the rest of your study will be vain and perhaps even harmful. For everything that does not arise from faith is sin, and that which is not with Christ, is against Him.

In the second letter to Cantiuncula, Agrippa formulated almost the same thought: 'sed hortor ad charismata meliora, ad studium sacrarum literarum et cognitionis Dei, sine quibus omne iuris studium vanum est, et forte noxium' [but I encourage you to examine better offerings, namely to study the Holy Bible and the knowledge of God, without which all study of the law is idle and perhaps harmful], and further elaborated it by contrasting the world of secular learning, of

disciplines, but every one and even the most lofty of the disciplines] (*Epistolae*, 2, 12, p. 655). 'Nam quicquid habet ipsa Latinitas, sive in bene dicendi artificio, sive in philosophia, sive in theologia, sive etiam in historia, quasi totum hoc et omne a Graecis mutuatur. Caeterum vero cum infinita pene sunt, quae ignorantur, respectu illorum, quae sciuntur, scias te tanto fore doctiorem, quanto nescieris pauciora. Non igitur paucis, nec humilibus, sed plurimis et optimis quibusque disciplinis indefesso studio est incumbendum' [For whatever the Latin literature has, be it in eloquence, in philosophy, in theology, even in the historical disciplines, it borrows it almost entirely and fully from the Greeks. But although there are almost countless things which can not be known, you must know, as far as the things which can be known are concerned, that you will be the more learned, the fewer things you ignore] (*Epistolae*, 3, 31, p. 741). In Agrippa's time, Greek was still looked at with suspicion as a source of heresy; see, e.g., a 1530/1531 letter to Erasmus from Nicolas Mallarius and Erasmus's reply; Allen, no. 2424 and 2466, and a passage from the *Defensio*, in which Agrippa criticizes his Dominican opponent for attacking those who favor the study of Greek (*Defensio*, fols. K iij~K iiij', for the Dominican's attack, and fol. K iiij', for Agrippa's reaction). See for the wider cultural context Lloyd-Jones, 'The *Apologia* for Hellenism in the French Renaissance.'

the interests of the state (which benefits from a good legal system) and of created things in general on the one hand with the world of sacred learning, of the interests of the individual in his relation to the creator, and of divine things in general on the other hand. The opposition between these two fields reflects the common Neoplatonic notion that reason and faith are two completely separate fields, each with its own method and goal, and that they should not be mixed. Finally, Agrippa formulated in this letter to Cantiuncula a rather vague mystical belief about man's relation with the Creator, which not only explains why his endorsement of the humanistic arts curriculum had certain restrictions, but which must also be considered to be the point of departure for Agrippa's entire way of thinking and acting:

Nam reliqua omnia, quaecunque extra se quis cognoscit, extra se permanebunt; ipsa autem essentialis intrinseca cognitio non est ex carne et sanguine, nec in multitudine librorum et lectionis, nec in pluralitate experientiae et antiquitate dierum, nec in persuasionibus humani verbi et contentione rationis, sed in ipsa passione divinorum, ut ait Dionysius in libro *Divinorum nominum*: Non in discendo, sed in patiando divina hominis mens perficitur. Sed non sufficit id ita nobis ab autore aliquo esse persuasum, nisi sit et ipsa experientia cognitum, quae datur paucissimis.⁵³ (*Epistolae*, 2, 14, d.d. 1518, p. 660. Also in Kisch, *Claudius Cantiuncula*, pp. 292–293)

For all those other things outside oneself which one investigates will remain outside oneself. For essential, intrinsic knowledge does not consist of flesh and blood, nor in the reading of many books, nor in practical wisdom and experience of life, nor in the persuasiveness of the human word and the efforts of the mind, but in our subjection to divine things, as Dionysius [Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite] says in his book *Divine Names*: 'The mind of man is made perfect not by learning, but by undergoing the divine things.' But it is not enough that we accept this on the authority of some author or other, unless we know it by our own experience, and this is given to only very few.

Probably the most intimate of Agrippa's friends in Metz was Father Claude Dieudonné (Deodatus), a monk who lived at the Celestine

⁵³ Compare *Epistolae*, 5, 19, d.d. 19 November 1527, pp. 880–881, where Agrippa also uses the expression 'pati divina' [to undergo the divine things] to describe the mystical experience for which all men must aim; he admits never having had the experience himself. See also above, Introduction, p. 7, note 21.

monastery in the city. Their correspondence contains an exchange of eleven letters, all of which discuss, either exclusively or in passing, theological topics. Six letters were exchanged during Agrippa's stay in Metz, and the remaining five written after his departure.⁵⁴

From these letters it becomes clear that during the first year of his stay, Agrippa visited Deodatus's monastery regularly and that he discussed theology extensively with Deodatus and the other monks. Thus, Agrippa gave oral presentations in the monastery, for instance on his own dialogue *De homine* and on the subject of Original Sin and the Fall of the Angels. The day after he gave this last talk, Deodatus wrote Agrippa to ask for a brief outline of it.⁵⁵ Agrippa consented to this request, and it is probable that this was the occasion to write the *Declamatio de originali peccato* [Declamation on Original Sin]. This treatise, published for the first time in the *Collected Treatises*,⁵⁶ is the first theological treatise which Agrippa was explicitly to call a declamation.

This is perhaps the best place in our survey to mention two undated brief tracts on religious matters, which might originate from this period.⁵⁷ They are the above mentioned *sermones* or lectures delivered in an informal setting to religious friends, addressed in both texts as 'colendissimi patres' [most venerable fathers]. The first, *Sermo de vita monastica* [Lecture on monastic life], written for an abbot of the Benedictine monastery at Brauweiler (or Browiler) near Cologne, contains a praise of the contemplative life-style. The second, *Sermo de inventione reliquiarum Beati Antonii Heremitae* [Lecture on the discovery of the relics of Saint Antony, the Hermit], written for a member of the order of the Antoninians, discusses the finding of the relics of the fourth-century hermit Saint Antony of Egypt and defends the proper veneration of relics in general. Both writings were published for the first time in the second edition of the *Collected Treatises*, published at Cologne in 1532 (and *Opera*, pp. 565–581).

The correspondence between Agrippa and Deodatus also reveals that Agrippa acted as Deodatus's spiritual counsellor.⁵⁸ Deodatus visited Agrippa frequently in his home to study the Bible. In *Epistolae*, 2, 23,

⁵⁴ *Epistolae*, 2, 20–25; 29 (written during Agrippa's stay in Metz); 3, 7; 9–12 (written after Agrippa's stay in Metz), d.d. 1518–1521, pp. 669–674; 677; 724; 726–728.

⁵⁵ *Epistolae*, 2, 20–21, n.d., pp. 669–670.

⁵⁶ *Collected Treatises*, fols. I 3^r–K 4^r; *Opera*, pp. 550–565.

⁵⁷ Agrippa mentioned that he had written 'uarii sermones' and 'sermones et epistolae' in the *Defensio* of 1519, fols. B vi^r and B vii^r.

⁵⁸ *Epistolae*, 2, 20, n.d., p. 669.

we read that some of Deodatus's fellow friars opposed the intimacy of their friendship and were spreading compromising rumors about the two men. This frightened Deodatus, who wished to interrupt his frequent visits to Agrippa, but Agrippa encouraged him to ignore the rumors. It is unknown whether they went on seeing each other as frequently as initially. But the contact surely remained substantial, since both during Agrippa's stay in Metz and after, Agrippa and Deodatus exchanged theological books, notably works of Erasmus, Luther and Lefèvre d'Etaples, and they exchanged ideas about their contents.⁵⁹

Agrippa's stay in Metz produced more material which enables us to assess his position as a student of divine letters. He had two major conflicts with churchmen, from which his attitude as a Biblical scholar, and specially his attitude toward the new humanistic theology becomes clear. For this reason we shall deal with these two episodes in some detail.

The triple marriage of Saint Anne

In *Epistolae*, 2, 24, Deodatus sent back to Agrippa some theological books by Erasmus and Lefèvre d'Etaples, which he had borrowed from his friend.⁶⁰ Among the works Deodatus had wanted to read figured Lefèvre's *De una ex tribus Maria*, recently published in Paris and immediately condemned by the Sorbonne.⁶¹ In this essay, Lefèvre refuted those recent theologians who had supported the popular legend of the *trinubium*, that is, the legend that Saint Anne was married three times, namely to Joachim, Cleophas and Salome (or Salomas), and that in each marriage she had given birth to a daughter called Mary, namely the Blessed Virgin and two other Marys who were considered to be the mothers of a number of Apostles. Lefèvre's argumentation rests exclusively on detailed critical analysis and interpretation of relevant Biblical texts and early Christian historical writers such as Eusebius. Anticipating the widespread criticism of his work, Lefèvre ended his essay by stating emphatically that his goal was not to attack the veneration of saints as such, but rather to stimu-

⁵⁹ See *Epistolae*, 2, 23–24, n.d., pp. 671–672; 3, 7, d.d. 26 June 1521, p. 724; 3, 10, d.d. 2 October (1521), pp. 726–727; 3, 12, d.d. 1521, p. 728.

⁶⁰ *Epistolae*, 2, 24, n.d., pp. 672–673.

⁶¹ J. Lefèvre d'Etaples, *De Maria Magdalena, Triduo Christi et ex tribus una Maria, disceptatis* (..), Paris, 1518. *De una ex tribus Maria* covers fols. 62^r–90^v.

late genuine devotion, and not to attack the Church, but rather to defend it by removing mistakes that had crept into its practices. Agrippa had read this essay with great attention and was very enthusiastic about it, so much so that he talked about it with his colleagues. This turned out to be a mistake, and led to a fierce polemic with the Dominican Claude Salin.

When, in a private conversation about Saint Anne's triple marriage, Agrippa was unable to convince one of the aldermen of the city that Lefèvre was right in opposing the popular legend, the two men decided to submit their difference of opinion to a third party. Agrippa then left Metz for a short business trip, and after his return, he stayed home for a few days to recover from an illness. Meanwhile, the disagreement between Agrippa and the town official had become known, and as a result, a number of professional preachers sermonized violently ('quaestuarii isti clamatores,' Agrippa called them)⁶² against Agrippa's opinion. In a letter, Agrippa mentioned three monks specifically as the assailants of Lefèvre's (and Agrippa's) opinion, namely a Franciscan named Dominus Delphinus, a minorite Nicolaus Orici, and the Dominican Claude Salin, who had recently graduated as a doctor in theology from the Sorbonne.⁶³ At the request of his friends, Agrippa came forward with a statement in eighteen points ('Propositiones') summarizing Lefèvre's essay. Agrippa's aim was to bring the opposition to enter into public discussion with him, and thus, as he puts it, to settle the matter in a way that would benefit Christian society ('ad commodum christianae reipublicae').⁶⁴

A response to Agrippa's statement did indeed come, but it was a condemnation in the form of a series of *Conclusiones* attacking the statement. As becomes clear from the formal rebuttal of these *Conclusiones* (about which more below), Agrippa was gravely affronted because this condemnation had come anonymously. Thus, his hope for a debate was frustrated, and the *Conclusiones* gave the impression of having been intended as slanderous statements rather than as

⁶² *Propositiones*, fol. A vi^r. See also *De incertitudine*, ch. 21, on the declamation of speeches (ed. 1531, fols. E iii^j-v; *Opera*, pp. 53-54), where Agrippa gives a graphic description of the exaggerated histrionics of preachers. In *Defensio*, fols. C iii^j-C v^r, Agrippa mentions that the monks also gesticulated and raised their voices excessively during disputations.

⁶³ *Epistolae*, 2, 25, n.d., pp. 673-674. For Salin see Farge, *Biographical Register of Paris Doctors of Theology*, p. 399.

⁶⁴ *Propositiones*, fols. A vi^r-v. *Epistolae*, 2, 25, n.d., pp. 673-674.

arguments in a learned debate.⁶⁵ In a letter written to inform Lefèvre d'Étaples about the affair, Agrippa told him that he had learned the identity of the opponent who had wished to remain anonymous: it was the Dominican Claude Salin.⁶⁶ All in all, it is clear that the mode of action taken by the Dominican opponent resembled that of Agrippa's opponent in Dôle almost ten years earlier, and Agrippa reacted in like fashion.

He immediately set to work on a rebuttal of the *Conclusiones*, the *Defensio*, which is written with considerably more vehemence than the self-defense of 1510. With noticeable enthusiasm, Agrippa wrote to Lefèvre in an undated letter of 1519 that he had finished a long defense of his statement of eighteen points, which he had delivered to Salin and which he would also have sent to Lefèvre if he had had another copy available.⁶⁷ We may well wonder whether Lefèvre really wanted to read Agrippa's document, for he had shown interest in the affair at first,⁶⁸ but soon after he had pointed out to Agrippa that a quarrel with his opponents would be useless, and he urged him, if he wanted to react, to do so with self-control.⁶⁹ Yet Agrippa did precisely the opposite and his defense contains violent outbursts of sarcasm against his opponent. A detailed analysis of its content is unnecessary for our purposes here, since Agrippa followed roughly the argumentation of Lefèvre's essay, but we shall return to several passages from the *Defensio* in chapter 2 below.

For unclear reasons, the *Defensio* was published only years later,⁷⁰ namely in 1534, in an edition which bears no place of publication or printer's name. It is uncertain whether the text in its published form is completely the same as that which Agrippa announced to Lefèvre in 1519, because there is some indication that Agrippa might have changed the text after 1519. Shortly after Agrippa left Metz definitively, Brennonius reported to his friend in a letter of 12 February 1520⁷¹ that a public council had been held in one of the town churches, during which a confrontation over the triple marriage of

⁶⁵ *Defensio*, fols. B iiiij^v–B v^r.

⁶⁶ *Epistolae*, 2, 30, d.d. 22 May 1519, p. 678.

⁶⁷ *Epistolae*, 2, 35, d.d. 1519, p. 682.

⁶⁸ *Epistolae*, 2, 28, d.d. 20 May 1519, p. 676.

⁶⁹ *Epistolae*, 2, 32, d.d. 23 May 1519, pp. 679–680.

⁷⁰ On July 21, 1519, Cantiuncula invited Agrippa to send the self-defense against Salin to him in Basel, in order to have it printed there, but Agrippa apparently never accepted this offer. See Cantiuncula's letter in Appendix 2, below.

⁷¹ *Epistolae*, 2, 44, d.d. 12 February 1520, pp. 694–697.

Saint Anne took place between members of the Dominican order and several supporters of Lefèvre's opinion, among whom Brennonius. It is a very lively letter, accurately described by Morley as containing 'some of the most graphic sketches of the sort of life that was then being led at Metz among the scholars and the theologians' (vol. 2, p. 68). In his report of the discussion, Brennonius emphasized that the Dominicans were insensitive to the argument that the legend of the *trinubium* is not confirmed by Biblical authority, and that therefore all doubts about the immaculate conception of Holy Mary were scandalous. Brennonius had then unleashed the anger of the Dominicans by sneering at their point of view and their argumentation; one Dominican, Claude Drouvyn, had finally told Brennonius that he would have liked to see him burned as a heretic. Brennonius did not make much of this threat, but Agrippa reacted furiously to this report, and promised Brennonius that the Dominicans' disdainful treatment of himself and all the supporters of Lefèvre's view would not go unpunished, since he would take up the matter again.⁷² Several months later, Agrippa wrote that he was writing a book against the Dominicans of Metz, which he had not finished due to illness, but for which he had already found a publisher.⁷³ The only writing to which Agrippa can be referring here is the edition of 1534, which includes Agrippa's initial statement of eighteen points (*Propositiones*), the *Conclusiones* of Salin against this statement, Agrippa's *Defensio* written in response to the *Conclusiones*, plus a number of letters pertaining to the affair (among which figure all the letters which document the quarrel about the *trinubium*).⁷⁴ Since the *Defensio*, such as it was published in 1534, is written in an extremely sarcastic tone, it is possible that the writing in progress which Agrippa mentioned to Brennonius

⁷² *Epistolae*, 2, 45, d.d. 20 February 1520, pp. 697–698.

⁷³ *Epistolae*, 2, 50, d.d. 4 May 1520, p. 705.

⁷⁴ The 1534 edition contains a preface to the reader and a dedicatory epistle, dated 1534, to John of Niedbruck. The dedicatory letter also exists as *Epistolae*, 7, 35, pp. 1060–1062, but in this edition, the letter is dated 1533 instead of 1534, and it is directed to Claude Chansonette, not Niedbruck. On September 26, 1524, Agrippa promised to send a copy of the manuscript with his defense against the Dominican Salin for publication to his friend Brennonius, who at that time had a printing press at his disposal (*Epistolae*, 3, 62, p. 767); this publication apparently never materialized. The letters included in *De beatissimae Annae monogamia*, fols. N i^r–S viii^r, are the following, listed in the order of their appearance: *Epistolae*, 2, 20–25; 2, 29; 2, 27–28; 2, 30–31; 2, 35–37; 2, 58; 2, 43–47; 2, 49–50; 2, 59; 2, 38–40; 3, 62. One letter from Cantuincula to Agrippa, d.d. 21 July 1519, printed at fols. O vii^r–O viii^r, is not included in the *Epistolae*, see the text of this letter in Appendix 2 below.

in 1520 was in fact a revision of the reaction to the *Conclusiones* which he had announced to Lefèvre in 1519 as finished. Agrippa might very well have completed the *Defensio* in its definitive form only after his quarrel with the Louvain theologians in 1531/32, since he was to suggest in the 1533 or 1534 dedicatory epistle of the edition containing the *Defensio* that it was after this quarrel that he finally decided to challenge openly the conservative theologians from Metz.⁷⁵

The witch trial

During his stay at Metz, Agrippa had a second conflict with a member of the Dominican order. This conflict concerns the famous affair of the woman from the village of Woippy, who was put on trial on account of a dubious charge of witchcraft brought against her by her fellow villagers, and whom Agrippa succeeded with great difficulty in saving from the stake. Agrippa's involvement in this matter has first of all a legal side, because he was involved in the trial from the start, probably in his capacity as legal adviser to the magistrate of Metz.⁷⁶ In this function he opposed the local Inquisitor Nicolas Savin, a member of the Dominican order, who acted as the 'assessor' [counsellor] of the judge.⁷⁷ In a letter in which Agrippa gives a juridical report of this trial, it becomes clear that he saw the local Inquisitor as the villain in the whole affair, because he deliberately acted contrary to the law in order to enforce the torture and condemnation of the victim.⁷⁸

In another letter, written during the trial and directed to the second judge who presided over the trial (the first judge having died), Agrippa gave his perception of the case from a theological point of view.⁷⁹ By the time this letter was written, the woman had been put on the rack several times on the basis of the allegations brought

⁷⁵ *De beatissimae Annae monogamia*, fols. A iij^{r-v}.

⁷⁶ See the excellent analysis of the affair in Ziegeler, *Möglichkeiten der Kritik am Hexen- und Zauberwesen im ausgehenden Mittelalter*, chapter VI ('Agrippa von Nettesheim und der Metzger Hexenprozess des Jahres 1519'), specially pp. 150–158, for Agrippa's legal role in the trial.

⁷⁷ Ziegeler, p. 148.

⁷⁸ *Epistolae*, 2, 40, n.d., pp. 689–691; *De beatissimae Annae monogamia*, fols. S v^r–S vii^v. In the *Opera* the letter is addressed to Cantiuncula; in *De beatissimae Annae monogamia* it has different opening and closing sentences and is addressed to the Imperial Counsellor of the Province of Luxemburg.

⁷⁹ *Epistolae*, 2, 39, d.d. 1519, pp. 687–689.

against her, and the Inquisitor had been present at each of these sessions. In his letter, Agrippa pronounced the trial and specially the Inquisitor's behavior as being contrary to human decency, the law, and the spirit of Christianity. Furthermore, Agrippa pointed out to the new judge that he had already argued decisively against one of the arguments which had been brought to the fore by the Inquisitor, namely the argument (extracted from the *Malleus maleficarum*) that witchcraft is hereditary and that women often get pregnant as a result of intercourse with the devil. Agrippa had objected that this argument opposed the current teaching on baptism. To explain this point to the new judge, Agrippa reminded him that every man and woman comes into this world as a child of the devil, only to become a child of Jesus by virtue of the grace of baptism. He concluded his letter with the request that the Inquisitor be ignored for the rest of the trial.

As mentioned above, Agrippa succeeded in saving the life of the victim, but the activities of the Inquisitor were by no means curtailed. In one of his letters written to keep Agrippa informed about things in Metz after he had left, Brennonius gave a horrifying picture of a witch trial in which Savin achieved the torturing and burning alive of an old woman. Savin also summoned the entire population to hunt for witches, and when Brennonius dared to challenge Savin in public, a large crowd resisted him.⁸⁰ This letter is an excellent document with which to illustrate the craze for witch-hunting in the early sixteenth century.

As a result of the conflicts which he had had in Metz with the two Dominicans, Agrippa's position there became untenable. At the beginning of 1520 he finally received permission from his employer to leave Metz,⁸¹ and moved with his wife and child to Cologne, where he stayed a year, apparently without regular employment.⁸² From there he went to Geneva, where he became a citizen and worked as a physician.⁸³ Shortly before he left Cologne for Geneva, his wife became ill. She died soon after, probably during the journey, and was

⁸⁰ *Epistolae*, 2, 59, d.d. 27 September 1520, pp. 715–717.

⁸¹ *Epistolae*, 2, 42, d.d. 25 January 1520, pp. 692–693.

⁸² *Epistolae*, 2, 45–3, 6, pp. 697–723, cover this period.

⁸³ *Epistolae*, 3, 7, d.d. 26 June 1521, p. 724, mentions that Agrippa had arrived in Geneva. On the Geneva citizenship and his activity as town physician see Nauert, p. 72. See on his activity as physician also A. Daquet, 'Agrippa bei den Schweizern', *Arch. de la société d'histoire de Fribourg*, 1858, pp. 133 ff. This reference stems from Jegel, 'Die Lebenstragödie des Dr. jur. et med. Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim,' p. 46.

buried in Metz.⁸⁴ At Agrippa's request, yearly masses were celebrated in her memory on the date of her death by his friend Brennonius.⁸⁵ A few months later Agrippa took a second wife, a woman from Geneva, who bore him six children.⁸⁶

In the course of 1522, Agrippa negotiated in vain for a position at the court of Charles III, Duke of Savoy, where he had worked briefly before coming to Metz, and he received a lucrative offer from France, which for unclear reasons he did not accept.⁸⁷ Instead, he went to Freiburg in Switzerland at the beginning of 1523, and took up the position of town physician.⁸⁸

5. *Lyon (1524–1528)*

In the early part of 1524, Agrippa moved to Lyon, where he had been offered the position of physician to Louise of Savoy, the French Queen Mother.⁸⁹ Agrippa's stay at the French Royal court was never to become a success, because the Queen Mother made him write, to his great distress, astrological prognostications. She also suspected him of being a partisan of Charles of Bourbon, who had by this time betrayed the King and was fighting on the side of the Emperor.⁹⁰ (Agrippa was indeed in touch with the Duke during this time.) The letters which inform us of the confrontation between Agrippa and Louise concerning the prognostications are interesting, because they show to what extent Agrippa despised the popular belief in astrology.⁹¹

⁸⁴ *Epistolae*, 3, 8, d.d. 19 July 1521, p. 724.

⁸⁵ Brennonius mentions the preparations for this mass in *Epistolae*, 4, 27, d.d. 23 July 1526, p. 807.

⁸⁶ See on his second wife *Epistolae*, 3, 60, d.d. 20 August 1524, p. 766. See on Agrippa's children Nauert, p. 101, note 56 and Prost, vol. 2, Appendice, note 8, pp. 451–459.

⁸⁷ See for the negotiations with the Duke of Savoy *Epistolae*, 3, 24–29, d.d. 19 September–3 October 1522, pp. 735–739. See for the offer from France *Epistolae*, 3, 24, p. 736.

⁸⁸ *Epistolae*, 3, 38–39, d.d. 20 March and 6 April 1523, pp. 748–749, and *Epistolae*, 3, 55, d.d. 'ipsa die qua sol quintum sagittarii gradum permeabat' 1523, pp. 758–759. Orsier, *Henri Cornélis Agrippa*, p. 21, note 3 records that the Freiburg archives mention Agrippa's name on the payroll as town physician.

⁸⁹ *Epistolae*, 3, 58, d.d. 3 May 1524, p. 764, is Agrippa's first letter from Lyon.

⁹⁰ See for the suspicion of partisanship with the Duke of Bourbon specially *Epistolae*, 4, 62, d.d. 3 November 1526, pp. 843–844.

⁹¹ See specially *Epistolae*, 4, 19, d.d. 18 June 1526, pp. 798–799; 4, 29, d.d. 3 August 1526, pp. 809–810.

When the Queen Mother left Lyon in August 1525 (at that time she was acting as Regent as a result of the King's internment in Madrid), first to accompany her daughter Princess Margaret to Spain and from there to go to Paris, she ordered Agrippa to stay in Lyon. From that moment his position was completely uncertain and the royal treasurers ceased to pay him his salary.⁹² During this time, Agrippa's complaints about the unwillingness of the treasurers to pay him, and about the treacherousness of the French court in general and the Queen Mother in particular increase rapidly.

In the midst of all this, Agrippa published, early in 1526, the *Declamatio de sacramento matrimonii* [Declamation on the sacrament of marriage]. The edition contains a French translation by Agrippa himself.⁹³ In this Declamation, which was dedicated to Margaret of Angoulême, duchess of Alençon, the recently widowed sister of King Francis I, Agrippa discusses a few key Biblical texts on the basis of which the Christian teaching on marriage can be explained (specially Genesis 1, 28 and 1 Corinthians 7, 9) and he criticizes certain customs and civil laws which impede second marriages. The content of this declamation will be studied in detail in chapter 8 below. If Agrippa hoped to recover some of the lost favor by dedicating this work to the Princess, his plan backfired, because court theologians criticized particular points in it, behind Agrippa's back, in the presence of the Queen Mother.⁹⁴ Later that year, the Queen Mother became even more estranged from Agrippa because of his reluctance to make astrological prognostications and because she found out that Agrippa had expressed his disapproval of her belief in astrology in letters to his friends.⁹⁵ In September 1526 Agrippa finished his most famous declamation, the *De incertitudine et vanitate scientiarum et artium atque excellentia verbi Dei declamatio* [Declamation on the uncertainty and vanity of sciences and arts, and on the excellence of the word of God, henceforth called *De incertitudine*]. It was published for the first

⁹² See for these developments specially *Epistolae*, 3, 79, d.d. 8 August 1525, pp. 778–779; 4, 2, d.d. 2 April 1526, pp. 782–783; 4, 9, d.d. 6 May 1526, pp. 790–791; 4, 10, d.d. 17 May 1526, pp. 791–792.

⁹³ The Latin text reprinted in *Collected Treatises*, fols. D 6^r–E 6^r; *Opera*, pp. 536–549. The French translation was reprinted in Droz, *Chemins de l'hérésie. Textes et documents*, vol. 2, pp. 1–27.

⁹⁴ *Epistolae*, 4, 2–3, d.d. 2 April–1 May 1526, pp. 782–784.

⁹⁵ See specially *Epistolae*, 4, 19, 29, 36, 44 and 48, dd. 18 June 1526–26 September 1526, pp. 798, 809–810, 816–817, 821–822, 824–825.

time at Antwerp in 1530.⁹⁶ The main idea underlying this declamation is the dualism which permeates Neoplatonic philosophy, that is, the view that the world of divine things and the world of created things are completely separate. The thesis which Agrippa develops is twofold. He argues that the material world is far less ideal than the divine world, because it offers uncertainty and moral imperfection. More specifically, Agrippa shows first, by means of an encyclopedic survey of the arts and sciences, that in each single art and science the differences of opinion between scholars throughout the ages have been more numerous than the things about which they agree (chapters 1–53). He then reviews a great variety of examples from history to show that men, in their moral depravation resulting from the Fall, have mostly used the arts and sciences to do evil things (chapters 54–96). Finally, he returns to the uncertainty of the products of the human mind by discussing the errors and contradictions which occur in various kinds of theology, namely scholastic theology, Biblical exegesis and the revelations of the Biblical prophets, which Agrippa considers to be the highest form of theology (chapters 97–99). This entire argument forms the basis for the idea, explained in strongly hortatory fashion in the final chapters of the declamation (chapters 100–102 and the peroration), that man can not find the existential certainty which he is seeking independently, by the force of his intellect, but only by means of the grace of faith. In this context, Agrippa formulates a passionate appeal to the readers of his generation to conduct their life and pursuits more in accordance with the spiritual, divine call of the Gospel.

As early as November 1526, Agrippa indicated that he wanted to conclude his commitment to the Royal court.⁹⁷ In July 1527 he offered his resignation,⁹⁸ and he actually left Lyon at the end of 1527.

⁹⁶ 'Scripsi his diebus volumen satis amplum, cui de Incertitudine et vanitate scientiarum, atque excellentia verbi Dei titulum feci' [During these days I have written a large work, which I have given the title On the uncertainty and vanity of sciences and on the excellence of the word of God] (*Epistolae*, 4, 44, d.d. 16 September 1526, p. 821).

⁹⁷ *Epistolae*, 4, 62, d.d. 3 November 1526, pp. 842–848.

⁹⁸ *Epistolae*, 5, 9, d.d. 17 July 1527, p. 870. He repeated the request to be released from his contract in *Epistolae*, 5, 10, d.d. 12 August 1527, pp. 870–871.

6. *The Low Countries (1528–1532)*

Agrippa headed with his family to Antwerp, where two new friends with whom he had been in touch since September 1527, the merchant Augustinus Furnarius and the Augustinian friar Aurelius ab Aquapendente, would welcome him. After a delay of several months in Paris during which Agrippa had to wait for safe-conducts from the French and Flemish authorities, and tried to collect money for the trip, he travelled to Antwerp where he arrived in July 1528.⁹⁹ Apparently for financial reasons, his family was able to make the journey only later, in late October and early November.¹⁰⁰

Agrippa obtained a position as advisor ('a consiliis et archivis indiciarius') and historiographer ('historiographus') to Margaret of Austria, governor of the Low Countries.¹⁰¹ In this function he wrote two speeches,¹⁰² one short historiographical work,¹⁰³ and two works which remained unpublished and are lost today.¹⁰⁴

Initially, Agrippa seems to have had a peaceful and happy time in the Low Countries. This period was interrupted on August 17, 1529

⁹⁹ *Epistolae*, 5, 27, d.d. 17 March 1528, pp. 891–892, gives an accurate impression of Agrippa's situation at that time. It is likely that *Oratio VIII*, written on behalf of a relative who was a Carmelite and delivered in Paris (*Collected Orations*, fols. D v^v–D vi^r; *Opera*, pp. 1118–1119) dates from this period.

¹⁰⁰ See *Epistolae*, 5, 57 and 58, d.d. October 1528, pp. 912–913, and 5, 60, d.d. 5 November 1528, p. 914.

¹⁰¹ Orsier, *Henri Cornelis Agrippa*, p. 40, note 2, mentions the Royal 'lettres patentes' in the Archives Royales (Brussels) relative to this appointment. His official title as advisor is mentioned on the front page of the *editio princeps* and several early editions of *De incertitudine*. In *Epistolae*, 6, 3, n.d., pp. 938–939, Agrippa thanks Princess Margaret for granting him this post and he pledges to serve her faithfully to the best of his ability.

¹⁰² The funeral oration of Margaret of Austria (who died on December 1, 1530) and a speech of welcome to the Emperor written for the latter's nephew, John of Denmark, published as *Oratio IX* and *X* in *Collected Orations*, fols. D vi^v–G i^r; *Opera*, pp. 1119–1149. The funeral oration was also published separately in Antwerp in 1531. That edition contains an additional dedicatory letter addressed to the president of the secret counsel of the Emperor, Jean Carondelet, which also exists as *Epistolae*, 6, 10, d.d. 23 December 1530, pp. 948–949.

¹⁰³ Namely a report of the coronation of Charles V as king of the Lombards and Holy Roman Emperor at Bologna in February, 1530 (*De duplici coronatione Caroli V Caesaris apud Bononiam, historiola*; in *Collected Orations*, fols. G i^v–I iii^r, with a separate preface to the reader). The letter of dedication to Princess Margaret of Austria is *Epistolae*, 6, 3, n.d., pp. 938–939.

¹⁰⁴ Namely a History of the war fought in Italy between Charles, the Duke of Bourbon, and the French monarchy, and a file of the instructions concerning an expedition against the Turks and sent to various princes in Italy and Germany. The works are mentioned in *Epistolae*, 7, 21, n.d., p. 1026.

by the death of his second wife, who became a victim of the plague which swept Antwerp.¹⁰⁵ His letters show that he was actively engaged in scientific experiments and other occult matters, for which his new friend Aurelius ab Aquapendente had considerable enthusiasm. Agrippa's fame as a physician encouraged members of the elite to solicit his services. For instance, on 4 June 1529 a member of the Paedagogium Lilianorum asked him to come to Louvain to treat the chronically ill wife of one of the town secretaries.¹⁰⁶ Agrippa also treated patients during the plague that killed his wife.

During the period which ended with his wife's death, Agrippa found ample time for his private studies. As early as 1524, when he was living in Lyon, Agrippa had talked about publishing his *Opuscula*.¹⁰⁷ In 1529 he was finally able to publish a volume with his collected treatises, namely *De nobilitate et praecellentia foeminei sexus*, *Expostulatio*, *De triplici ratione cognoscendi Deum*, *De sacramento matrimonii*, *Dehortatio gentilis theologiae*, *De originali peccato*, and a small tract in which he described the treatment of epidemic disease, written in 1518, the *Regimen adversus pestilentiam*. Three years later, in 1532, a second edition of the collected treatises was published in Cologne, including two previously unpublished texts already mentioned above, namely the *Sermo de vita monastica* [Lecture on monastic life] and *Sermo de inventione reliquiarum Beati Antonii Heremitae* [Lecture on the discovery of the relics of Saint Antony, the Hermit].

At the beginning of 1529 (1530, n.s.)¹⁰⁸ Agrippa obtained an Imperial Privilege to publish several of his works, which are enumerated in the text of the privilege as follows: *De occulta philosophia*, *De incertitudine*, *In Artem brevem Raymundi Lullii Commentaria et Tabula Abbreviata*, and finally *Orationes et Epistolae*.¹⁰⁹ In September 1530 he published *De incertitudine*. Notwithstanding the Imperial Privilege under which this writing was published, Agrippa's employer, Princess Margaret, considered its orthodoxy to be suspect. Her attention had been drawn to the Declamation by court clergymen, men who were by nature experts at intrigue (as Agrippa claims in one of his letters). Without

¹⁰⁵ *Epistolae*, 5, 81, d.d. 1529, pp. 928–929. See on the date of his wife's death Prost, vol. 2, p. 453. Agrippa describes the symptoms of the disease which killed his wife in *Epistolae*, 5, 85, d.d. 13 October 1529, pp. 934–937.

¹⁰⁶ *Epistolae*, 5, 71, p. 922.

¹⁰⁷ *Epistolae*, 3, 62, d.d. 26 September 1524, p. 767.

¹⁰⁸ See on this date Prost, vol. 1, p. 40, note 1.

¹⁰⁹ The text of the privilege has most recently been printed in *De occulta philosophia*, ed. Perrone Compagni, pp. 63–64.

Agrippa's knowledge the Princess sent it for review to the Faculty of Theology at Louvain.¹¹⁰ She died soon after, in December 1530. Simultaneously, the book was sent (by the same men who had informed the Princess, according to Agrippa in the same letter), to the Emperor's brother Ferdinand, who was angered by its content and wrote about it to the Emperor.¹¹¹

The Louvain theologians attacked the *De incertitudine* in a secret document presented to the Privy Council of the Emperor. More specifically, they condemned the main thesis of Agrippa's Declamation as an 'assertio,' in other words, as a formal statement opposing the official doctrine of the Church. They also attacked eighteen diverse statements made in various chapters as 'propositiones piarum aurium offensivae' or blasphemous statements. Agrippa managed to get hold of the incriminating document and wrote a large *Apologia* to defend himself, to which we shall return in detail. For the moment, it suffices to note that these events constituted for Agrippa yet another proof of the wickedness of the churchmen, because they attacked him behind his back, without giving him a chance to defend himself against the charges of heresy. He also wrote a *Querela* against those whom he held responsible for attacking his good reputation with the Emperor. Both works were published together, anonymously and with considerable delay, in 1533, after Agrippa had left the Low Countries.¹¹² We shall discuss the Louvain attack and Agrippa's response to it in detail in chapters 4 and 5. In addition to the Louvain theologians, the theologians of the Sorbonne condemned *De incertitudine* as a work favoring Lutheranism. On March 2, 1531, they publicly condemned *De incertitudine*, less than a month after it had been published in Paris. In chapter 4 we shall also briefly discuss this condemnation.

After the troubles surrounding *De incertitudine*, Agrippa lost the court's favor, and he once more became destitute.¹¹³ He no longer received payment from the court,¹¹⁴ and at the end of 1530 he moved from

¹¹⁰ See for the archival document proving this development Nauert, p. 107, note 9. See for Agrippa's claim that court clergymen ('cuculliones illi') had turned the Princess against the Declamation, *Epistolae*, 6, 15, d.d. 19 January 1531, p. 955.

¹¹¹ *Epistolae*, 6, 15, d.d. 19 January 1531, p. 955.

¹¹² See Prost, vol. 2, Appendice, note 31, pp. 515-516.

¹¹³ The first letter in which the fall from favor and his poverty are mentioned is *Epistolae*, 6, 18, d.d. 12 May 1531, pp. 956-959.

¹¹⁴ E.g. *Epistolae*, 6, 27, d.d. 1531, pp. 974-975, in which Agrippa asks the Emperor in person for his outstanding salary or for an honorable discharge. He was

Antwerp to Malines, where he hoped to set up a less luxurious household. His financial problems increased however, and he was briefly imprisoned for debt in August 1531.¹¹⁵

Some time after his release from prison, in the first part of 1532, he made a journey to Cologne, to visit the Archbishop elector, Hermann von Wied.¹¹⁶ From the correspondence it is clear that he had renewed his contacts in his home town at the beginning of 1531. In January 1531, he dedicated to Hermann von Wied the first book of his *De occulta philosophia*, which appeared that year in several editions at Cologne, Antwerp and Paris.¹¹⁷

These editions contain only the first book, because the death of Margaret of Austria in December 1530 had interrupted Agrippa's private studies.¹¹⁸ The first full edition was finally published at Cologne in 1533, by the printer J. Soter, with separate dedications of the second and third book to Hermann von Wied.¹¹⁹ The dedicatory letter of the second book makes clear that the Archbishop's support in the midst of Agrippa's troubles had been crucial in encouraging him to go on with the publication of *De occulta philosophia*. The letter mentions only the problems concerning *De incertitudine*, but there were also difficulties with the publication of *De occulta philosophia* itself. More specifically, the Inquisitor of Cologne, Konrad Köllin of Ulm, tried to prevent its publication by preaching sermons against the book and by denouncing its content as heretical before the City Council.¹²⁰

still asking for the same thing when he wrote, from Bonn in 1532, a grievance to the new governor of the Low Countries, Mary of Hungary (*Epistolae*, 7, 21, pp. 1020–1030).

¹¹⁵ See *Epistolae*, 6, 21–26, pp. 964–974.

¹¹⁶ See *Epistolae*, 7, 1, d.d. 1 February 1532, p. 996; 7, 4–6, d.d. 7 February–17 March 1532, pp. 998–999.

¹¹⁷ See *De occulta philosophia*, ed. Perrone Compagni, introduction, p. 8; Prost, vol. 2, Appendice, note 30 and note 34, nos. 9 and 10, pp. 510–515; 528–529. The dedicatory letter to the Archbishop is also published as *Epistolae*, 6, 13, d.d. January 1531, pp. 952–954. On 10 January 1531, a friend wrote to Agrippa from Cologne that the Archbishop, who had been shown a sample of the book, was ready to receive Agrippa as his guest (*Epistolae*, 6, 14, p. 954).

¹¹⁸ Agrippa declared this in the dedication of book two to Hermann von Wied; *De occulta philosophia libri tres*, ed. Nowotny, fol. i 1^v.

¹¹⁹ The dedicatory letters in *De occulta philosophia*, ed. Perrone Compagni, pp. 247–248; 399–401; ed. Nowotny, fols. i i^v; s i^v. See Schmitz, 'Das humanistische Verlagsprogramm Johannes Soters,' pp. 94–95.

¹²⁰ See *Epistolae*, 7, 24, d.d. 1 January 1533 (a friend to Agrippa); 7, 25, d.d. 8 January 1533 (the Cologne printer Soter to Agrippa); 7, 27, 28, 30, n.d. (Agrippa to the Archbishop Hermann von Wied), pp. 1035–1037; 1052–1056. See also the beginning of *Epistolae*, 7, 26, d.d. 11 January 1533, p. 1037. On Köllin see Wilms,

The Inquisitor's attempt gave rise to a renewed effort on Agrippa's part to publicly denounce as unfair, and unworthy of Christians, the practice of condemning as heretical certain authors and ideas without a proper preliminary investigation. His counterattack took the shape of three different writings composed in a short period of time. First, in order to counter the Inquisitor's opposition directly, Agrippa wrote a long address to the City Council of Cologne, in which he not only defended his own work, but also denounced the actions of the Cologne Faculty of Theology against those scholars who advocated reform in the Church and in theology.¹²¹ Among these scholars, he mentioned the famous humanists Reuchlin and Erasmus, and the more locally known Hermann, count von Neuena(h)r and Peter of Ravenna by name, thus presenting himself unequivocally as a defender of the *bonae literae* in general. This address was published in Strasbourg 1535 as a pamphlet. A German translation of Agrippa's address was printed simultaneously; this translation was in its turn condemned by the University of Cologne.¹²² Secondly, he wrote a book on all the scandalous and heretical passages in the works of the Cologne Dominicans. This book is mentioned in the address to the Cologne City Council.¹²³ Nothing of this work seems to have survived today, but from a passage in the writings of the inquisitor Sisto da Siena (1520–1569) we know that a composition on this topic written by Agrippa was circulating in the sixteenth century.¹²⁴ Finally, in 1533, Agrippa wrote the preface for an edition of the selected writings of

Der Kölner Universitätsprofessor Konrad Köllin. According to Wilms, Agrippa's anger over the Inquisitor's action against *De occulta philosophia* and his public reaction were exaggerated.

¹²¹ *Epistolae*, 7, 26, d.d. 11 January 1533, pp. 1037–1052. The names of the humanists who were attacked by the Cologne theologians at p. 1040.

¹²² *Epistola apologetica ad clarissimum urbis Agrippinae Romanorum Coloniae Senatum, contra insaniam Conradi Cölin de Ulma Ordinis praedicatorii monachum Henrici Cornelii Agrippae ab Nettesheym* (see the *Index Aureliensis*, no. 101.859); *Ein sendtbrief an Burgermeister unnd Raht der stat Cöln, wieder die Sophisten, des strengen Ritters . . . Henrici Cornelii Agrippae, newlich verdeütschet* (see *Index Aureliensis*, no. 101.860). The translation is by a certain Theodorus Faber or Dietrich Fabritius; see Keussen, 'Neue Beiträge zur Geschichte des Theodor Fabritius.'

¹²³ 'In eo libro quem de Fratrum Praedicatorum sceleribus et haeresibus inscripsi' [In the book which I entitled: On the misdeeds and heresies of the predicant brothers] (*Epistolae*, 7, 26, d.d. 11 January 1533, p. 1042).

¹²⁴ Sisto da Siena, *Bibliotheca sancta* (. . .) *libri VIII* (1566), book V, adnotatio 73, p. 348c, mentions a work by Agrippa with the title *Adversus lamiarum inquisitores* [Against the inquisitors of ghosts]. The hypothesis that this title refers to the work mentioned by Agrippa in *Epistolae*, 7, 26 was formulated by Zambelli, 'Cornelio Agrippa, Sisto da Siena e gli inquisitori.'

an otherwise unknown Cistercian monk Godoschalcus Moncordius, whom Agrippa had met personally in Bonn. In the preface, Agrippa pointed out that he approved of the Cistercian's method of theologizing, and that he saw the publication of his works as a part of his ongoing battle against the Dominican theologians.¹²⁵ Agrippa says that he delivered the manuscript to a publisher's workshop in Nuremberg, whose name he expressly suppresses ('Ioanni N. bibliopolae Norinbergae'),¹²⁶ but the publication seems never to have appeared.¹²⁷

7. *Final years: Cologne, Bonn, France (1532–1535)*

In order to escape his creditors, Agrippa travelled at some time in 1532 with his entire family from Malines to his native land, a move which he hoped to be temporary.¹²⁸ From then until the correspondence is interrupted in the middle of 1533, he resided mainly in Bonn. In Bonn, he wrote an appeal to Mary of Hungary, the successor of Margaret of Austria as governor of the Low Countries, to ask for payment of his overdue salary or for an honorable discharge from Imperial service.¹²⁹ In Bonn, he also wrote the above-mentioned address to the city council of Cologne, in defense of *De occulta philosophia*. During this time, he continued his effort to publish the works which he still had in his portfolio. In 1533, his commentary on the 'Ars brevis' of Ramon Lull went through the press of J. Soter in

¹²⁵ '... quos (libros) cum non minus diligenter, quam avide perlegissem, cognovissemque illius dogmata valida scripturarum auctoritate atque concinna rationum veritate suffulta, mox cogitavi operaepretium me facturum, si illa in publicum prodirent. ... placebunt (sc. opuscula) autem eo magis, quo Coloniensibus theologastris plurimum displicent, quibus displicent omnia bona, apud quos etiam pietas haeresis est: ...' [After I had read these books with both great diligence and enthusiasm, and had realized that his beliefs are supported by the strength of Scriptural authority and elegant reasoning reflecting the truth, I soon thought it would be worthwhile for me if they were published. ... These little writings will be the more appealing to us, the more strongly they displease the Cologne theologians, who are displeased by all good things and who consider even piety to be a heresy] (*Epistolae*, 7, 37, d.d. 1533, p. 1063).

¹²⁶ There does not seem to have been a printer in Nuremberg, working between 1500 and 1535, whose family name begins with N; see Benzing, *Die Buchdrucker des 16. und 17. Jahrhunderts im deutschen Sprachgebiet*, pp. 350–357.

¹²⁷ See Prost, vol. 2, pp. 395–396; Zambelli, 'C. Agrippa. Scritti inediti e dispersi pubblicati e illustrati,' p. 220.

¹²⁸ *Epistolae*, 7, 21, n.d., p. 1025.

¹²⁹ *Epistolae*, 7, 21, n.d., pp. 1020–1030.

Cologne.¹³⁰ This work, which mainly explains Lull's universal method for establishing accurate knowledge in all departments of science, was written sometime in the early part of Agrippa's career. He dedicated it to Jean de Laurencin, possibly around 1517, but it was written much earlier.¹³¹ When it came out in 1533, it was augmented by a schematic survey of the commentary (intended to facilitate the process of memorizing), dedicated to a certain cleric named A. Roboreus. In this commentary, Agrippa seems to accept Lull's basic idea that universal knowledge is accessible through a well-organized system of notions describing the universe on the one hand and rules of argumentation on the other. Interestingly, Agrippa has much to say on the particular form in which Lull's logical system for understanding the universe is to be presented. In this context he refers, time and again, to elements of the theory of rhetoric. For instance, in the second part, when he describes how the principles of 'inventio' function within the Lullian system, he stresses the need to vary the form of logical propositions, both for esthetic and for practical purposes.¹³² More specifically, in the section covering the actual formation of arguments utilizing the basic elements or notions that describe reality, Agrippa stresses that the syllogism, the foundation of all argumentation, can take different forms, namely 'enthymema,' 'inductio' and 'exemplum.'¹³³ These various forms of the syllogism, possibly described

¹³⁰ *Commentaria in Artem brevem Raimundi Lulli; Tabula abbreviata commentariorum artis inventivae*. Panzer, *Annales typographici* (. . .), p. 415, no. 616, and von Murr, 'Conspicuum omnium Editionum Operum Henrici Cornelii Agrippae ab Nettesheim,' p. 81, record a 1531 imprint by J. Soter in Cologne, but this edition seems not to have survived; see Schmitz, 'Das humanistische Verlagsprogramm Johannes Soters,' p. 94.

¹³¹ Agrippa says in the undated dedicatory epistle that he had finished the work a long time ago: 'quae [sc. commentariola] cum iam diu apud me detinerem' [which small commentaries I kept in my portfolio for a long time already] (*Opera*, vol. 2, p. 318). See Nauert, p. 52 and Backus, 'Agrippa on "Human Knowledge of God" and "Human Knowledge of the External World"', p. 147, note 1, who assumes the date of composition to be sometime before 1510.

¹³² 'Illud autem observandum est, ut in conficiendis propositionibus, non semper uniformem rationem adhibeamus, sed variare oportet, tum propter decorem, tum etiam propter usum: . . .' [It must be observed that when we form propositions, we must not always apply the same form, but that we must vary, both in view of elegance and of utility] (*Opera*, vol. 2, p. 393); the second part, dealing with 'inventio complexorum', covers pp. 393-416.

¹³³ *Opera*, vol. 2, p. 402. This passage is briefly discussed in Meurer, *Zur Logik des Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim*, pp. 38-39. Meurer considers the passage typical of Agrippa's weak treatment of Aristotelian-scholastic logic, in that it brings rhetorical elements into logic. He states that Agrippa follows the practice of Italian logic (pp. 56-57). In fact, the Aristotelian definition of the different forms of the

directly according to their definition in Aristotle's *Rhetoric* (I, 2, 8), strongly suggest that Agrippa is more interested in a system that sets rules for human communication concerning ideas (we may even say opinions) than in a system that secures the absolute validity of each pronounced statement. To these four traditional syllogistic forms of argumentation, Agrippa adds a fifth, which he calls rhetorical argumentation. He divides it into five parts, 'propositio,' 'ratio,' 'rationis confirmatio vel dissolutio' ('loci,' 'argumenta'), 'exornatio,' 'conclusio'.¹³⁴ Finally, the third part of the commentary, dealing with the practical use of the Lullian system, relies for its basic structure and ideas on the precepts of rhetoric. Agrippa discusses three elements that can form part of any argumentation, the *ingressio*, consisting of *exordium*, *narratio*, *divisio*, the *deductio*, which takes different forms, among which the rhetorical *confirmatio* and *confutatio*, and finally the *conclusio*, which, like the *ingressio*, is completely described following the standard rules of rhetorical theory.¹³⁵ Thus, Agrippa's commentary on the 'Ars brevis' of Lull presents itself as a typically humanist treatment of medieval logic, since it not only pays attention to the rules of pure thinking, but also to the effective presentation of arguments and ways to communicate with an audience.

In 1535, J. Soter printed Agrippa's *Collected Orations*, a volume containing ten orations and the report of the double coronation of Charles V. It is unknown whether Agrippa prepared this edition himself, and whether he was still alive when it was published.

After the middle of 1533, Agrippa's correspondence stops. Wild stories concerning his final years and death started to circulate soon after his death, all inspired by the widespread belief, spurred on by his detractors in the Church, that he had been an evil sorcerer. The only reliable facts were recorded by Agrippa's student Jean Wier (1515–1588), who wrote briefly about his former master and friend, in *De praestigiis daemonum* (1563), chapters 2, 5. Wier records that Agrippa continued to live in Bonn for a time, where he took a third wife whom he repudiated in 1535. Later in 1535, Wier writes, Agrippa

sylogism is clearly present in medieval logic; see, e.g., Petrus Hispanus, *Summulae logicales*, 5.03, ed. L.M. de Rijk, Assen, 1972, pp. 56–58.

¹³⁴ Ibid. Meurer, p. 39, remarks that Agrippa is thinking of the 'thesis,' the thirteenth of the standard series of fourteen rhetorical exercises ('progymnasmata').

¹³⁵ The third part, dealing with 'universalis artis dispositio et applicatio' covers pp. 417–448. It includes three examples of a full argumentation developed along the principles set forth by Agrippa.

went to Lyon, where he was briefly imprisoned by King Francis I, because he had insulted the Queen Mother in his writings. He died that same year in Grenoble (and not Lyon, as Jovius claims in his well-known biographical notice on Agrippa).¹³⁶

¹³⁶ Compare J.-A. de Thou, *Historiae sui temporis*, who also writes that Agrippa died in Grenoble; de Thou mentions Agrippa ('homo cum primis eruditus et magicis superstitionibus infamis' [a most learned man, ill spoken of because of his superstitious beliefs in magic]), when he records in book 89 the death of Wier (1588), and he stresses that it was assumed in his time that Wier had published his *De praestigiis daemonum* in order to honor the memory of Agrippa (*secunda editio*, vol. 4, p. 265c).

CHAPTER TWO

AGRIPPA AND SCHOLASTIC THEOLOGY

1. *Introduction*

In the *Dialogus de homine* Agrippa gives a digest of the standard Neoplatonic anthropological notions, to which he fully subscribes and which constitute the basic premise of his theological thought. The Neoplatonists believed that in Paradise man had existed as an asexual (i.e. hermaphroditic), partly material and partly divine, being in direct relationship with God. As a result of Original Sin, the divine side of man, shaped by his affinity with God, was violated, and the harmony between the divinity and the earthliness of man was disturbed. It is man's task, in his terrestrial existence, to restore the original relationship with God through all the means which he has at his disposal. In practice, these means are for the Renaissance Neoplatonists the activities to which Agrippa devoted his entire life, namely on the one hand the study of the created things in which God reveals himself to man (i.e. the 'arcana' or 'secreta naturae'; occult philosophy), and on the other hand the study of divine things (i.e. the 'res sacrae'; theology).

A proper spiritual attitude toward God, or, to use the term frequently adopted by Agrippa, faith ('fides'), is the most important prior condition necessary to ensure that those activities aiming at the restoration of mankind's pristine closeness to God are constructive rather than ineffective or even harmful. Thus, in the study of the secrets of nature, Agrippa stresses throughout his lifetime that an attitude of faith will protect the occultist from becoming the victim of bad demons. Even though our focus here is not on Agrippa the occultist, it will be useful to illustrate with a few texts how Agrippa always makes a clear distinction between good (white) and bad (black) magic, and to see how his approval of good magic is always accompanied by the condemnation of bad magic. This point will help us realize that Agrippa was always scrupulous, not only as a researcher of occult things, but also as a Christian.

Defense of good magic

As Agrippa explained in his 1509/1510 letter to Trithemius, sent to the abbot to accompany the complete manuscript of *De occulta philosophia*, his study of occult philosophy was written to vindicate magic from the widespread disrepute caused by the activities of charlatans.¹ In the first chapter of the third book of *De occulta philosophia*, called 'De necessitate, virtute et utilitate religionis,' a text which remained unchanged throughout the later revisions and expansions,² Agrippa discusses the importance of religion in the study of magic, and suggests that only those who have the proper religious attitude can practice magic without falling victim to evil demons:

Religio enim sacra mentem purgat redditque divinam; iuvat etiam naturam naturalesque roborat virtutes, quemadmodum medicus corporis iuvat sanitatem et agricola terrae virtutem adiuvat. Quicunque vero religione relictā naturalibus tantum confidunt, solent a malis daemonibus saepissime falli; ex intellectu autem religionis contemptus medelaque nascitur vitiorum et contra malos daemones tutamentum: denique nil Deo gratius et acceptius quam homo perfecte pius ac vere religiosus, qui tam homines caeteros praecellit, quam ipse a diis immortalibus distat. (*De occulta philosophia*, ed. Perrone Compagni, p. 402)

Holy religion purifies the mind and makes it divine. It also helps nature and fortifies the natural forces, just as a physician helps the health of the body and the farmer helps the power of the earth. Nevertheless, whoever abandons religion and puts his confidence solely in material things is very frequently deceived by evil demons. From the understanding of religion springs forth disdain of and recovery from all vice, as well as the protection against evil demons. In short, nothing is more pleasing to God than one who is thoroughly devout and truly religious, who surpasses his fellow humans just as much as he himself is distant from the immortal gods.

More than fifteen years later, Agrippa writes about those who misuse magic, in a famous passage from chapter 48 of *De incertitudine*, dealing with the various forms of trickery ('De praestigiis'), ranging from mythological stories such as the *Metamorphoses* of Ovid to the witchcraft of Simon the sorcerer and Jannes and Jambres. In this text

¹ *Epistolae*, 1, 23, n.d., pp. 620–621; *De occulta philosophia*, ed. Perrone Compagni, pp. 68–69.

² See *De occulta philosophia*, ed. Perrone Compagni, table of comparison, p. 57.

Agrippa again stresses that it is the attitude of the practitioner toward faith and religion which determines whether magic is good or bad. This text is particularly famous because, in a section in which Agrippa mentions his own *De occulta philosophia*, he proclaims that he wishes to recant whatever erroneous opinions on magic he had expressed in this youthful writing:

Verum de magicis scripsi ego iuvenis adhuc libros tres, amplo satis volumine, quos de occulta philosophia nuncupavi, in quibus quidquid tunc per curiosam adolescentiam erratum est, nunc cautior hac palinodia recantatum volo; per multum enim temporis et rerum in his vanitatibus olim contrivi. (*De incertitudine*, ed. 1531, fol. 59^v; *Opera*, p. 104)

When I was still young I wrote a rather long work in three books on magic, which I called On occult philosophy. Whatever mistakes I made in those books due to my youthful curiosity, I want now to retract, since I have become more prudent, for I used to spend much time and resources on these follies.

This passage has often been discussed, and usually cited as proof of Agrippa's insincerity, since he did not in fact withdraw *De occulta philosophia*, but instead published it shortly after this recantation was published. The point, however, is that the inconsistency in Agrippa's attitude toward magic which seems to emerge from this publication, is not real, but only seemingly so.

First, there is a circumstantial reason. Agrippa has clearly and convincingly explained the practical circumstances which led to his decision to have *De occulta philosophia* printed in the letter to the reader, which is prefixed to both the 1531 and the 1533 editions. In this letter, he observes that his work on magic circulated throughout Europe in imperfect manuscripts, and he plausibly argues that an authorized edition of the full text would be less harmful than the circulation of fragmentary and corrupt versions of the same text. He also considered the publication of his early work after so many years to be opportune, because it made it possible to include his revisions. We have seen in the biographical sketch that Agrippa did indeed keep correcting the first version and adding new material to it over the years.³

³ *De occulta philosophia*, ed. Perrone Compagni, p. 66, line 14–p. 67, line 5. See above, chapter 1, pp. 16–17.

The second reason brings us to the controversial passage from *De incertitudine*. Upon close reading of this passage, it becomes clear that Agrippa had not come to consider magic as altogether worthless. Instead, he stated that, as he had grown more mature, he better understood under which circumstances magic is harmful:

Tandem hoc profeci quod sciam quis rationibus oporteat alios ab hac pernicie dehortari. (*De incertitudine*, ed. 1531, fol. 59^v; *Opera*, p. 104).

I have finally made such progress, that I now know on which grounds I must dissuade others from these pernicious matters.

These grounds are then specifically mentioned. They amount not to a categorical rejection of magic, but to a statement of the conditions under which the practice of magic is permissible:

Quicumque enim non in veritate, nec in virtute Dei, sed in elusione daemonum, secundum operationem malorum spirituum, divinare et prophetare praesumunt, et per vanitates magicas, exorcismos, incantationes, amatoria agogima, et caetera opera daemoniaca et idololatriae fraudes exercentes, praestigia et phantasmata ostentantes, mox cessantia miracula sese operari iactant, omnes hi cum Iamne et Mambre et Simone mago aeternis ignibus cruciandi destinabuntur. (*De incertitudine*, ed. 1531, fol. 59^v; *Opera*, pp. 104–105)

For whoever dares to divine and prophesy, not in truth and in the power of God, but through the trickery of demons, following the operation of bad spirits, and whoever boasts that he performs miracles (which soon fail to materialize) through the vanities of magic, exorcism, incantations, love-charms, and other demonic operations, practising idolatrous deceits and displaying phantasmal tricks, all these will, together with Jannes and Jambres [see 2 Timothy 3, 8] and Simon the sorcerer [see Acts 8, 9], be tormented by eternal fire.

In other words, this passage from *De incertitudine* does not only leave room for legitimate, non-demonic occultism, as Zambelli and Keefer have already argued,⁴ but it also formulates specifically the circumstances under which magic is, according to Agrippa, a useful and even salutary undertaking.

⁴ Zambelli, 'Umanesimo magico-astrologico e raggruppamenti segreti nei platonici della preriforma,' p. 146, note 10, and Keefer, 'Agrippa's Dilemma: Hermetic "Rebirth" and the Ambivalences of "De vanitate" and "De occulta philosophia,"' p. 645, note 78.

The contrast between good and bad magic and the explicit defense of good magic are not Agrippa's own invention, but have firm roots in the Neoplatonic doctrines of the Renaissance, more specifically in the work of Ficino himself. This becomes clear in the already mentioned letter to the reader, in which Agrippa also refers to the above discussion of *De occulta philosophia* in *De incertitudine*.⁵ This letter is in fact a carefully composed essay modelled after Marsilio Ficino's *Apologia*, which forms the conclusion of Ficino's famous *De vita sua* and is written in the form of a letter to three fellow magicians, namely Piero Nero, Piero Guicciardini and Piero Soderini. Agrippa's letter even contains some specific reminiscences and near citations from Ficino's text, specially concerning the notion of 'magus' (which does not mean a person who is prone to witchcraft and superstition, as the opponents of magic interpreted the word, but a person who has profound and divine wisdom) and concerning the intention of *De occulta philosophia* and *De vita sua* respectively. In this regard, both Ficino and Agrippa stress that they provide an informative survey of magic in its various historic appearances, without necessarily approving each form.⁶ Also, Agrippa's 1533 statement of the purpose of *De occulta philosophia* is identical in content and tenor to the formulation of this point made more than twenty years earlier, in his 1509/1510 letter to Trithemius.

After these brief remarks concerning Agrippa's attitude toward the study of created things, let us turn to his stance in the realm of divine studies. Here too, he was firmly convinced that a proper spiritual attitude, that is, an unshakable belief in God, is a *conditio sine qua non* to theologize in a meaningful way. For this reason, Agrippa rejects scholastic theology categorically, because it tries, as he sees it, to prove

⁵ *Contra* Keefer, p. 643, who argues that the preface to *De occulta philosophia* is self-contradictory and undermines Agrippa's defense of good magic.

⁶ Agrippa: 'Nam et ego vobis illa non probō, sed narro . . .' [For I do not pronounce those things (i.e., the doctrines set forth in the book) good, but I give an account of them]; 'sed quia admonui vos, multa me narrando potius quam affirmando scripsisse . . .' [but because I have informed you that I have written many things as one who gives an account rather than as one who asserts as true] (*De occulta philosophia*, ed. Perrone Compagni, p. 65, line 29–p. 66, line 1; p. 66, lines 10–11). Ficino: 'Surge post haec et tu, Guicciardine vehemens, atque curiosis ingeniis respondeto magiam vel imagines non probari quidem a Marsilio, sed narrari, Plotinum ipsum interpretante' [After this, arise in your turn, O mighty Guicciardini, and reply to intellectual busy-bodies that Marsilio is not approving magic and images but recounting them in the course of an interpretation of Plotinus] (Ficino, *Three Books on Life*, p. 396, lines 55–57, with facing translation).

religious truths by means of rational arguments (i.e., dialectic) and because it uses logic to interpret Scripture. For this reason, Agrippa oftentimes explicitly expresses the view that scholasticism, as a system, is a science of arrogant, irreligious people, who rely on their intellect where they should rely on faith. Simultaneously, Agrippa on several occasions, and with increasing indignation, notes (as mentioned in our biographical sketch), the apparent lack of willingness on the part of contemporary scholastic theologians to enter into an open debate over topics concerning which other theologians formulated different opinions from their own. Instead, the scholastic theologians preferred to condemn as heretical or as offensive to the Church the opinions of those other theologians who were, in the view of Agrippa and of his friends and followers as they appear in the correspondence, those very theologians who supported humanistic theology, men like Lefèvre d'Étaples, Reuchlin, Erasmus, Peter of Ravenna and Hermann, count von Neuena(h)r.

Although these two aspects are closely connected and often cannot be clearly distinguished in practice, it is useful, for the sake of clarity, to treat them as distinctive elements in Agrippa's critique of the scholastic theologians of his time. In this chapter and in chapter 3, we will discuss in detail Agrippa's rejection of scholasticism as a system, and give an outline of the method of theology which he saw as the alternative and practised in his own writings. Agrippa's criticism of the conservative theologians as opponents of the scholars and theologians who endorsed the new Biblical scholarship and who advocated reform in the Church will be the object of a separate, detailed study in chapters 4 and 5.

2. *Agrippa's rejection of the scholastic system as a basis for theology*

Definition of theology

To Agrippa, the term theology covers the entire field of 'res sacrae.' In a passage from the fifth chapter of *De triplici ratione cognoscendi Deum*, in which Agrippa sketches briefly the special quality of Christianity as opposed to the natural religions and to Judaism, Agrippa formulates briefly and clearly how, for him, theology is not only an intellectual activity, but also one that implies a spiritual and ethical vocation aimed at the discovery of the essence of God:

Ipsa vera sapientia Dei cognitio est, illustratio mentis, voluntatis correctio appetitioque rectae rationis, quaedam vitae certa lex sanctificans animam hominis, Deo disponens vitam, quid agendum, quid omittendum demonstrans. Quam nos sapientiam alio vocabulo theologiam vocamus, haec sapientia veraque Dei cognitio, imo contactus quidam Dei essentialis melior quam cognitio, traditur divinitus in evangelio. (*Collected Treatises*, fols. G 2^{r-v}; ed. Zambelli, p. 154)

True wisdom is the knowledge of God, the enlightenment of our mind, the improvement of our will, the longing for proper reason, a certain habit of life that purifies man's soul, puts his life at the service of God and shows what is to be done and what is to be avoided. That wisdom we can name with another word: theology. This wisdom or true knowledge of God, or rather this elemental contact with God, is transmitted by God in the Gospel.

In a similar vein, Agrippa answers as follows, in the *Defensio*, the claim of his opponent that he was not a real theologian:

Ego certe theologi nomen mihi arrogare non ausim, quippe qui non nescio quae vita, quae doctrina, quis afflatus theologico nomini debeat, quod qui vere profiteri debet, aliquid maius homine praestare possit necesse est. Sed ne quis me a theologis tam alienum putet, ut in prophanorum numero reputare meruerim, ipse unius veri Christi cultus sacrarumque literarum continua attractatio excusant. (*Defensio*, fol. B vi^r)

I certainly do not wish to claim the name theologian for myself, because I do not know what kind of life one must lead, what learning one must possess or what inspiration one must have to merit the title of 'theologian.' For he who must truly profess to be a theologian must necessarily be able to perform something greater than man is capable of. But lest anyone should think me such a stranger to the theologians that I might deserve to be counted among the number of the prophane, my very worship of the one and only Christ and my continuous study of Holy Writ serves as my defense.

And he then goes on to list his actual achievements in the field of theology, before turning to the skilful refutation, with theological arguments, of his opponent's objections to Lefèvre's work.

Because human intellect is not able to perceive divine things by its own force, Agrippa believes that in order to understand, even intellectually, the spirit of God, it is necessary for man to seek the assistance of God through prayer. Agrippa formulates this thought as follows, in *De triplici ratione cognoscendi Deum*:

Intellectus tamen noster, nisi per mentem illuminetur divinam, ab errore non est immunis, et frustra laborat in divinis. Unde Paulus ait: 'Non sumus sufficientes aliquid cogitare quasi ex nobis, sed sufficientia nostra ex Deo est,' quem invocandum, ad quem orandum in omni rerum principio, maxime tamen in theologia id fore agendum sacer praecipit Dionysius. (*Collected Treatises*, fol. G 2^v; ed. Zambelli, p. 154)

Yet our intellect is not free of error and it is of no avail in the area of divine things, unless it is illuminated by the divine spirit. Therefore Paul says: 'Not that of ourselves we are qualified to take credit for anything as coming from us; rather, our qualification comes from God' [2 Corinthians 3, 5]. The divine Dionysius advises that we must invoke God and pray to Him at the start of every undertaking, and we must specially do so in theology [see Dionysius the Areopagite, *De divinis nominibus*, 3; *Patrologia Graeca*, vol. 3, 680].

In later texts, Agrippa confirms this position. The most important text in this regard is chapter 100 of *De incertitudine*, on the Word of God. Here, Agrippa repeats that man needs faith in order to understand the proper message of the Bible, and that God decides whether the revelation formulated in Scripture will be recognized as such by man. Here, Agrippa uses the well-known Reformed dictum *sola fide*⁷ to stress that it is not through man's intellect, but through divine illumination that we can penetrate the true Biblical message:

Harum autem scripturarum (dico canonicarum) veritas et intelligentia a sola Dei revelantis auctoritate dependet, quae non ullo sensuum iudicio, nulla ratione discurrente, nullo syllogismo demonstrante, nulla scientia, nulla speculatione, nulla contemplatione, nullis denique humanis viribus comprehendi potest, nisi sola fide in Iesum Christum, a Deo patre per Spiritum sanctum in animam nostram transfusa. (*De incertitudine*, ed. 1531, fol. 152^r; *Opera*, p. 299)

The truth and understanding of these Scriptures—I mean those belonging to the canon of Scriptures—depends solely on the authority of God's revelation. This authority cannot be grasped by any judgement of our senses, by any reasoning of our mind, by any syllogism delivering proof, by any science, by any speculation, by any contemplation,

⁷ See also *De triplici ratione cognoscendi Deum*, fol. G 3^v: 'Sola enim fides instrumentum est et medium, qua sola possumus Deum cognoscere et, ut aiunt Platonici, qua sola ad Deum accedimus, divinamque nanciscimur protectionem ac virtutem' [For faith alone is the instrument and the vehicle through which we can learn to know God, and, as the Platonists say, through which we acquire divine protection and virtue].

in short, by any human powers, but only by faith in Jesus Christ, poured into our soul by God the Father through the intermediary of the Holy Spirit.

These texts show that to Agrippa's mind theology, or the search for the meaning of God's Word, is not primarily a discipline requiring man to examine the Biblical text rationally, but rather to project his thought into the realm of the divine, and to allow himself to be guided by faith and spiritual devotion. This view of what meaningful theology ought to be determined the reasons for which Agrippa categorically rejected scholastic theology.

Agrippa on scholastic theology

Chapter 97 of *De incertitudine* contains an informative survey of Agrippa's thoughts on scholastic theology (ed. 1531, fols. 143^{r-v}; *Opera*, pp. 282–283). In this chapter, Agrippa defines scholastic theology as the combined study of two essentially different things, namely Scripture ('divina eloquia') and philosophy ('philosophicae rationes'). Agrippa locates the origin of scholastic theology in the Sorbonne, and in addition to its centaur-like nature (the comparison is Agrippa's), he stresses that it differs from old theology by its style, which is characterized by the use of 'quaestiunculae' [trivial questions] and syllogisms devoid of all linguistic elegance. Although it is clear from this passage that Agrippa does not consider scholastic theology as an improvement over the older form of theology, he does not reject it altogether. In fact, he expresses his admiration for its intellectual copiousness ('iudicio et intellectu plenissima') and stresses its usefulness in the refutation of heretics. He hails, in particular, three well-known thirteenth-century theologians as the great masters of scholasticism, namely Thomas Aquinas (1224/25–1274), Albertus the Great (c. 1193–1280) and John Duns Scotus (c. 1265–1308). Yet, after this period of greatness, Agrippa states, scholastic theology degenerated into a meaningless battle of words ('logomachia'), which has completely supplanted true theology, namely the study of Scripture in a spirit of faith and devotion.

In short, chapter 97 of *De incertitudine* contains a brief statement illustrating why Agrippa rejects scholastic theology and particularly those scholars of his time who practised it. In the following pages, we shall take a closer look at the reasons for Agrippa's disapproval and at the way in which he accounts for it. Some representative texts will be reviewed, and a number of textual fragments will be

analyzed in detail. Two main reasons justify our detailed study of this topic. First, if we wish to understand Agrippa's position in the intellectual world of his time, it is important to understand that Agrippa's focus on faith and his corresponding criticism of scholastic theology as a system which relies solely on reason, are rooted in the Neoplatonic thought which Agrippa cultivated, and for which he was greatly indebted to certain contemporary philosophers. Two short passages from Reuchlin's *De verbo mirifico*, a work which Agrippa knew very well, will be discussed to this end. Second, it is useful to take a close look at two texts of Agrippa, namely a brief section from the Pavia inaugural lecture and a fragment from *De triplici ratione cognoscendi Deum*. These passages demonstrate the type of theological thinking which Agrippa practised as an alternative to scholastic theology. His method is characterized by the intensive use of authoritative texts, primarily Biblical texts, Church Fathers and other religious texts, and texts from canon and civil law. Thus, simply reading these passages will contribute to our understanding of the form and structure which are typical of Agrippa's own theological writings, among which his declamations figure prominently.

Reuchlin's 'De verbo mirifico'

The dialogue *De verbo mirifico* (Basel, 1494) is one of the well-known philosophical texts attesting the influence of Neoplatonism in Northern Europe. Agrippa knew it very well as a young scholar, before his lengthy stay in Italy enabled him to become thoroughly acquainted with the important Neoplatonic texts of the Italian thinkers. Agrippa not only gave a number of lectures on Reuchlin's dialogue in 1509, at the University of Dôle, but the dialogue also has a marked influence on the first draft of *De occulta philosophia*, as attested by a large number of similarities.⁸ It is not necessary for our current purpose to analyse in detail the influence of *De verbo mirifico* on Agrippa's writings. We will merely present briefly two passages from it, in which scholasticism is discussed much in the same terms as Agrippa was to

⁸ Zika, 'Reuchlin's *De Verbo Mirifico* and the Magic Debate of the Late Fifteenth Century,' p. 121, note 49, p. 122 note 51, p. 130 note 84, and p. 138, note 112, points to several similarities between *De verbo mirifico* and *De occulta philosophia*. Other similarities are recorded in Perrone Compagni's apparatus to *De occulta philosophia*. Among the recent literature, Zika's article is a good introductory study to the *De verbo mirifico*.

use in his later writings. Although it is impossible to prove that Agrippa is directly dependent on Reuchlin in this regard, Reuchlin's text demonstrates at least that the ideas which Agrippa voiced in his own writings were not at all new.

De verbo mirifico deals with the three ways to learn to know God, namely the pagan way leading through the material world, the way via the Jewish revelation of the Old Testament and the way through the Christian revelation of the New Testament. According to Reuchlin, the sacred, 'wonder-working word' (that is, the sacred name of Jesus, or the Pentagrammaton IHSUH, which both encloses and supersedes the power of the pagan and Hebrew sacred names) is the instrument of the internal mystical union between man and God, and also the instrument by which man is able to perform external miraculous activities in the world.

The dialogue presents a discussion between three characters, namely Sidonius, who stands for pagan philosophy focused on natural sciences, Baruchias, who explains the cabbala, that is, the Jewish faith, and Reuchlin himself (or rather, his pen name Capnion), who formulates the Christian position. The thought that a fundamental difference exists between nature or created things and divine things runs through the dialogue like a continuous thread. Reuchlin points out that the study of nature is governed by the scientific method developed by Aristotle. Logic and dialectic are necessary to organize the perceptions of our senses and build up our intellectual knowledge. Divine things, on the other hand, or, as Reuchlin occasionally puts it more briefly, the 'truth', cannot be attained through our senses and our intellect, and cannot be known by any *ars* or scientific method. Knowledge in this field is, rather, revealed to us by God. The instruments to achieve knowledge of divine things are faith and contemplation (or, to use another term which occurs occasionally in Reuchlin's dialogue, silence), the two vehicles of our communication with God.

It is for this reason that Reuchlin categorically rejects scholasticism. At one point in the first book of his dialogue, Reuchlin describes the above-mentioned dichotomy in terms which constitute a clear dismissal of the scholastic method as a system unfit for theological inquiry:

Scio ego itemque Baruchias hic quod in sacris ediscendis longe alia via gradiendum sit quam mathematici physicique solent. Hi enim prius cornupetere atque contendere inter se putant commodissimum et in utram-

que partem dimicare, deinde per quaedam antecedentia sive axiomata seu tu principia voces, quae refellere nequeas, mox certe combinationis artificio concludere, quo ipse stare compellaris. At contra in divinis silentium desideratur, contentio respuitur, syllogismus irridetur. Nam divinitatis nullum est principium, nihil eam antecedit. Igitur quodcumque concludendum fuerit, eidem confestim acquiescendum est multo firmiori conditione quam scientia. (*De verbo mirifico*, ed. 1494, repr. 1964, p. 30)

I know too, interrupted Baruchias at this point, that in learning sacred things one must proceed by totally different means from those used by the mathematicians and the students of nature. For these men think it is most appropriate to operate first by confrontation and controversy, and by discussions pro and con. Then they use certain premises or axioms, or rather what you would call principles, things which you cannot but find compelling. Subsequently they formulate a conclusion by way of an artful combination of premises, which you cannot but abide by. In theology on the other hand, silence is required, rivalry is spurned, the syllogism is laughed at. Indeed, there exists no starting point for the divinity: nothing precedes it, and so, whatever conclusion one might draw, one must accept it immediately as a far more reliable fact than any scientific knowledge.

In a passage from Book Two, devoted to the cabbala, Reuchlin more specifically demonstrates his contempt for contemporary theologians, who explain the Bible incompetently. A brief description of the context of this passage will help us to grasp the scope of Reuchlin's remarks.

In the second book, Baruchias explains which characteristics of God are discerned by the cabbala. One of the points which he stresses is the fact that language is a divinely inspired medium, and that the relationship between man and God is expressed by holy words ('sacra nomina'). In this context, Hebrew occupies a special place because it is the only language which has not been tainted by the scattering of the languages which resulted from the construction of the tower of Babel (*De verbo mirifico*, pp. 42–46). Baruchias, Reuchlin's spokesman, explains that the purity of Hebrew has induced many people from various cultures to use Hebrew words in their religious rituals, in order to guarantee their success.⁹ Thus, the Evangelists, who recognized the sanctity of expressions used for divine operations, used magic

⁹ 'Credo enim multas gentes arcanis suis votis aut secretis operationibus hebraica miscuisse non aliam ob causam quam ut certius optatis potirentur' [For I believe

words from Hebrew origin. Baruchias discusses two examples of such magic words, namely 'hosannah' and 'talitha cumi.' In this context, severe criticism is formulated of the Western theological tradition and specifically of contemporary Christian theologians who pay no attention to the magical nature of these words. Thus, Baruchias points out that the form of the Hebrew word 'hoscihanna,' which occurs in three of the four Gospels, was corrupted to 'hosanna' by incompetent scribes.¹⁰

The discussion of the Aramaic expression 'talitha cumi' (Reuchlin's text has 'Thabiti Kumi') likewise shows Reuchlin's keen interest in Biblical exegesis. Christ used this expression when He raised the daughter of Jairus (Mark 5, 41). Baruchias provides a translation of these words: 'Respice, Surge' (Look attentively, stand up), and a definition of their mystical meaning, namely 'life' and 'restoration of good health',¹¹ then criticizes the literal translation of this text in the Vulgate: 'Puella, tibi dico surge' [Little girl, I say to you, arise].¹² Baruchias assumes that this erroneous translation was originally a gloss, which was incorporated by an incompetent scribe into the main text, and adds in a rather angry tone that some contemporary Christian scholars believe that 'Talitha' is the name of the girl. These observations then give Baruchias the occasion to make some bitter remarks about contemporary theologians:

Talia in multis sacrae scripturae locis ab indoctoribus corrupta invenietis, dum hac aetate plus solent theologi Aristotelis dialectica sophismata, quam divinae inspirationis et sancti spiritus animadvertere verba. Unde studio humanae inventionis ipsa caelestis traditio negligitur et loquacitas hominum extinguit Dei sermonem. (*De verbo mirifico*, ed. 1494, repr. 1964, p. 49)

that many peoples have mixed Hebrew words in their esoteric prayers or their secret rituals for no other reason than in order to obtain with more certitude what they wished] (*De verbo mirifico*, p. 48).

¹⁰ Mark 11, 9–10; John 12, 13; Matthew 21, 15. In the 1494 edition the word is spelled as 'hosthiana.' According to Baruchias, Luke did not reproduce the expression precisely because he feared the consequences of misreading the foreign expression (*De verbo mirifico*, p. 48).

¹¹ Baruchias cites Old Testament passages to illustrate that the mystical meaning he proposes for 'talitha' and 'cumi' is correct. For 'talitha' or 'respice' Baruchias cites Psalm 12 (13 in the Vulgate), 4; 21 (22 in the Vulgate) 18; 33 (32 in the Vulgate), 13; 34 (33 in the Vulgate), 6 and 119 (118 in the Vulgate), 18. With regard to Psalm 119 (118), 18 Baruchias remarks that the Vulgate translation 'considerabo' is poor and should be replaced by 'respiciam.' For 'cumi' or 'surge' he cites Song of Songs, 2, 10 (*De verbo mirifico*, p. 49).

¹² Compare the *Glossa ordinaria* ad loc.; Patrologia Latina, vol. 114, 200.

You will find many passages in Holy Scripture which are corrupted by incompetent men, because in these days the theologians tend to regard more closely the dialectical sophisms of Aristotle than the words of divine inspiration and the Holy Spirit. Consequently, the divine tradition is neglected by the attention paid to the inventiveness of the human mind, and the loquacity of men destroys the word of God.

Baruchias continues this harangue with a brief list of other New Testament passages which, according to Reuchlin, are conventionally misunderstood for similar reasons (*De verbo mirifico*, pp. 49–50).

This second text of Reuchlin completes the perception formulated in the first text. Where Reuchlin first denounced scholasticism chiefly on the grounds of epistemology, he now criticizes the leading theologians for lacking the competence to read the sacred texts properly (which is essential, according to Reuchlin, if we are to understand their mystical sense). Furthermore, this second text shows that Reuchlin was important for Agrippa not only as a Neoplatonist and a theologian with an penchant for mysticism, but also as a humanist, that is, the protagonist of a Biblical exegesis based on textual criticism and knowledge of the Biblical languages. In the initial phase of his career as a theologian, Agrippa did not become so clearly identifiable as a protagonist of the new Biblical scholarship (perhaps due in part to the fact that some of his work, namely the commentary on the letter to the Romans, is lost), but after his definitive return from Italy, it became a very prominent aspect of his theological writing, as we shall see below.

After the discussion of these texts from Reuchlin's *De verbo mirifico* illustrating the grounds on which Neoplatonists like Agrippa rejected scholastic theology, let us now take a look at some pertinent texts of Agrippa himself. Agrippa had greatly increased his knowledge of Neoplatonism during his lengthy stay in Italy and firmly grounded the theological ideas to which he remained faithful throughout the rest of his life. Two texts illustrate these theological ideas, namely a passage from the inaugural lecture on the *Pimander* (or the first dialogue of the *Corpus Hermeticum*) of 1515, and a passage from the *Liber* or *Sermo de triplici ratione cognoscendi Deum*, which he wrote around the same period. These two texts not only contain Agrippa's basic theological ideas, but also describe all the elements which constitute a full response to the question as to why Agrippa rejected the scholastic method of theology, and what sort of theology he advocated as an alternative.

We will begin our discussion with a long quotation from the *Oratio habita Papiæ*, to be followed by a detailed analysis of certain passages from this quotation. The excerpt in question is particularly illuminating, not only because it discusses in detail the reasons for which Agrippa dismissed scholastic theology, but also because it is written following the argumentational pattern which Agrippa substituted for the scholastic method. This second aspect, which will be dealt with in the following chapter, will demonstrate the standard form of argumentation developed in all the writings which Agrippa was to write as a student of the 'res sacrae.'

Oratio habita Papiæ in praelectione Hermetis Trismegisti de potestate et sapientia Dei

The inaugural lecture delivered at Pavia is a standard oration comprising an *exordium*, a main section and a conclusion.¹³ The main section consists of three parts. Agrippa first introduces the topic of his course, namely the dialogues of Hermes Trismegistus. He briefly conveys to his audience the legendary data, commonly held to be historically accurate in Agrippa's time,¹⁴ concerning the supposed author of these dialogues: Hermes, Abraham's son (called Enoch in the Old Testament), was the inventor of theology, because he was the first to write about topics such as the majesty of God, the hierarchy of spirits and the nature of the soul. He was also a prophet, because he predicted the downfall of the Old Law and the revelation of God in Christ as well as the entire divine message as revealed in the Gospel. The dialogues of the *Corpus Hermeticum*, Agrippa continues, teach us the proper attitude and the proper way to act in religion, things we need to know in order to make our mind as healthy as our body. It is this understanding and this wisdom that Agrippa says he wishes to teach to his students.

In the second part of his speech Agrippa elaborately declares, in a statement headed 'Protestatio' in the printed text, that he subordinates all that he says and writes to the judgment of the Church authorities. The third part, bearing the title 'Censura' in the printed

¹³ Text in *Collected Orations*, fols. B iii^v–C iii^r; *Opera*, pp. 1089–1101; *Oratio habita Papiæ*, ed. Zambelli, pp. 119–136.

¹⁴ The truth about the authorship of the *Corpus Hermeticum* was established at the beginning of the seventeenth century by Isaac Casaubonus (see Grafton, 'Protestant versus Prophet: Isaac Casaubon on Hermes Trismegistus').

text, contains a methodological remark. It is this long passage that concerns us here:

Reliquum adhuc superest unum, quod silentio praetereundum minime censeo, idque diligenter quaeso advertite. Tria potissimum in usu sunt penes scholasticos disserendi genera: unum a Stoicis ac Peripateticis plurimum exercitatum, qui videlicet, proposita re vel quaestione aliqua, alteram aut certam eius partem disputando defendunt atque adprobant, reliquas circa hanc opiniones confutantes; alterum apud Academicos ac Socraticos usitatum, qui in medium adducta re aliqua vel quaestione, diversas ad id quod investigatur sententias rationesque adferentes, illisque pluribus praepositis et ad rem ipsam invicem collatis, quod ex his verisimilius probabiliusque visum fuerit, id eligunt atque adfirmant. Hos utrosque modos in lectionibus nostris observare intendimus. Tertium vero disserendi genus Scepticorum est, quos penes nihil certum est quod sequantur, sed omnia illis indifferentia sunt, ideoque de omnibus in utranque partem disputant, et quae naturae ordine disiuncta distinctaque sunt permiscunt atque confundunt, et perinde ac gigantes montibus accumulantes, bellum contra deos gerere videntur, dum aliquot instructi syllogismis, homines rixosi ac meretriculis loquatiores, incunctanter audent quavis de re cum quovis linguam conferre; litigiosis enim quibusdam altercationum captiunculis ac sophismatum iaculis armati, omnium disciplinarum, etiam sacrarum literarum fores se posse diffringere et penetrare arbitrantur, atque hi a quibusque consummatis philosophis ac theologis aspernantur respuunturque. Horum scientiam Jacobus apostolus appellat terrenam, animalem, diabolicam, Paulus segregatus gentium doctor, in suis ad Titum et Timotheum epistolis, stultam, vanam, inutilem et contentiosam vocat. Super quo scribens Hieronymus: 'Dialectici,' inquit, 'solent argumentationibus retia obtendere et vagam rhetoricae libertatem in syllogismorum spineta concludere, in ea totos dies ac noctes conterentes, ut vel interrogent vel respondeant, vel dent propositionem vel accipiant, assumant, confirment atque concludant, quos quidem contentiosos vocat Apostolus.'¹⁵ Haec Hieronymus. Sed et multa contra eos loquuntur Gregorius Nazianzenus in libro secundo De theologia,¹⁶ et Urbanus Papa scribens Antiochenis,¹⁷ et beatus Athanasius

¹⁵ St. Jerome on Titus 3, 9, in *Patrologia Latina*, vol. 26, 631.

¹⁶ The five most famous orations of St. Gregory (Orations 27–31), labelled *Theological Orations* by the author himself, were usually entitled *Libri de theologia* in the sixteenth century. *Patrologia Graeca*, vol. 36, offers the Greek text with facing Latin translation; modern edition by J. Barbel, *Die fünf theologischen Reden*, Düsseldorf, 1963. As we will argue below, Agrippa has in mind not the second oration, but the first.

¹⁷ It is unclear to which text Agrippa is referring here. Pope Urban II (11th century) left a collection of letters (*Patrologia Latina*, vol. 151), but this collection

in epistola quae Enc<yc>lion dicitur ad Aegypti et Libyae episcopos.¹⁸ Divus item Ambrosius in libro de Trinitate,¹⁹ et multi alii sancti patres, quorum verba brevitatis causa adducere obmitto. Ex quorum dictis Gratianus decretista .xxx<vii>.d Nonne e<t> Legimus,²⁰ et .xxiv. quaest. ii, cap. Transferunt contra hos argumentatores constituit.²¹ Sed et leges civiles, codicis de Summa Trinitate lege III, frenum illis iniiciunt.²² Quemadmodum itaque argumentatores isti a quibusque splendidissimis philosophis, sanctissimis theologis ac celeberrimis utriusque iurisperitis repelluntur, sic etiam illos a nostris lectionibus quam longe abesse volumus. Nullius equidem vel argumenta vel quaestiones in cathedra recipere intendimus, verum, ne doctorum virorum iudicium vereri videar, neque etiam discipulorum meorum ingenio, contra id quod pollicitus sum, non velle satisfacere videar, atque ne quis aestimet nos responsionis penuria declinare certamen, iccirco cuicumque vel circa auctoris verba, vel circa testimonia per nos adducta vel aliter recitata seu exposita quippiam exigere vel contradicere libuerit, huic in fine lectionis verbo vel scripto id agere licebit; cui ad singula verba et sententias in subsequenti lectione abunde respondentes satisfaciemus. Quod si incommodum id erit, scripta scriptis referemus. Fecerunt sic veteres theologii, ex Graecis Origenes, Basilii, Athanasius, Cyrillus, Didymus, Eusebius, Chrysostomus, Nazianzenus; ex Latinis Tertullianus, Rufinus, Hieronymus, Augustinus et illorum plures alii. Qui quidem sancti viri nihil magis odere unquam quam verbosam illam contentionem, in qua plus stomacho quam ratione certatur, plus ad vanam linguae ac memoriae

does not contain any letter to the Antiochians. Pope Julius I wrote a letter to the Antiochians (Patrologia Latina, vol. 8, 881), but this letter does not seem to contain any passages relevant to Agrippa's argument.

¹⁸ *Epistola encyclica ad episcopos Aegypti et Libyae*, Patrologia Graeca, vol. 25, 538–594, offers the Greek text with facing Latin translation.

¹⁹ Pseudo-Ambrose, *De trinitate*, Patrologia Latina, vol. 17 (Ad opera S. Ambrosii Appendix), 535–579.

²⁰ The printed text is erroneous, because D. 30 deals with marriage. Zambelli's suggestion is plausible, namely that D. 30 is a mistake for D. 37, although it is unclear how the mistake could have originated paleographically. In any event, Agrippa has in mind D. 37 c. 3 and c. 7 (*Oratio habita Papiae* [ed. Zambelli], p. 135, note 55); 'eligimus' in the printed text is a corruption of 'et legimus.' Canon 3 contains a quotation from St. Jerome's commentary on Ephesians 4, stating that those who pursue worldly studies envelop themselves in vanity and obscurity; canon 7 deals with St. Jerome's dream (*Epistles*, 22, 30) and discusses various arguments pro and con worldly learning.

²¹ C. 24 q. 3 c. 33, where St. Jerome's commentary on Isaiah (2, 5) is cited, where the content of Isaiah 5 is applied to heretics harassing Christians by the use of dialectic.

²² Cf. Cod. 1, 1, 3, 1. The law referred to is the decision of the late fourth-century emperors Theodosius and Valentinianus to burn the books of Porphyry because they were considered to be in opposition to Christianity.

gloriam, quam ad pervestigandam veritatem; neque vere aliud moliuntur disceptatores isti, quam ut Pharisaica hypocrisi circumveniant hominem, donec capiant in verbo. Quod si quis ante istos verbo non labatur, hunc, iuxta sententiam Jacobi apostoli, oportebit esse perfectissimum. (*Collected Orations*, fols. ci^v-cii^r; *Opera*, pp. 1099-1101; ed. Zambelli, pp. 126-127)

There remains one thing which I believe must not be passed over in silence. I therefore ask you to listen carefully. Three kinds of reasoning are generally in use among scholars. The first kind is used primarily by the Stoics and the Peripatians. When a topic or a question is presented, they argue in favor of that side of the question which they take to be true, and refute any other opinions which may be held. The second kind is put to use by the Academicians and the philosophers of the Socratic school. When a topic or a question is brought to the fore, they present the various beliefs and arguments applicable to the subject, then review systematically the majority of these, one by one, and finally they choose and approve of that which seems most plausible and convincing. I intend to follow these two methods in my lectures. The third kind of reasoning is that of the Sceptics. They follow no firm method and everything is all the same to them. Consequently, they argue both for and against all subjects, and they mix up and confuse things which are by the order of nature separate and distinct. Like the giants piling up mountains, they seem to wage war against the gods, since they dare, equipped with their syllogisms, to exchange thoughts with anybody about anything, garrulous and loquacious people that they are worse even than prostitutes. Exploiting their deviousness and bad faith in debates, and using sharp sophisms as weapons, they believe they can open the gateways and distil the essence of all sciences, and even of Holy Scripture. In reality however, they are despised and held in contempt by all true philosophers and theologians. The Apostle James calls their knowledge 'earthly, unspiritual, demonic' [James 3, 15], Paul, set apart to teach the infidels [cp. Romans 1, 1], calls it in his letters to Titus and Timothy 'foolish, futile, useless and contentious' [Titus 3, 9; 2 Timothy 2, 23-24]. On this passage Jerome writes: 'The dialecticians usually obscure things with their argumentation and thwart unrestricted and candid eloquence by means of thorny syllogisms. Day and night they tire themselves with syllogisms: they put questions or they answer them, they present major premises or they listen to them, they formulate minor premises, confirm and draw conclusions. All these men are called quarrelers by the apostle.' Thus Jerome. But many statements are made against them also by Gregory of Nazianzus in the second book *On Theology*, by Pope Urban in a letter to the

Antiochians, by the sacred Athanasius in the encyclical letter to the bishops of Egypt and Libya; similarly the divine Ambrose in his book *On the Trinity* and many other holy Church fathers, whose words I will not cite for the sake of brevity. Their words are cited by Gratian, the author of the *Decretum*, who made a pronouncement against these arguers in part 1, d. 3<7>, c. 'Nonne' <and> 'Legimus,' and part 2, c. 24, q. 2, c. 'Transferunt.' But the civil code also puts them under restraint in the third law on the Holy Trinity. Consequently, just as these arguers are rejected by every one of the best philosophers, the most blessed theologians and the most famous specialists in civil and canon law, so I want them to keep far away from my lectures. I do not intend to admit the arguments or questions of any of them in my classes. However, I do not wish to give the impression that I fear the judgment of knowledgeable men, or that I am unwilling, in contradiction to what I have promised, to satisfy the curiosity of my students, and I do not wish anyone to feel that I am avoiding the debate because I am unable to answer. Therefore, anybody who wishes to obtain further explanations or to make objections concerning the words of Hermes Trismegistus or the testimonies which I cite or which I otherwise mention or explain, will have the freedom to express himself at the end of each lecture, either orally or in writing. In the following lecture, I shall respond satisfactorily to every word and opinion. If convenient, I will reply to written reactions in written form. That is how the old theologians operated, such as the Greeks, like Origen, Basil, Athanasius, Cyril, Didymus, Eusebius, Chrysostom, Gregory of Nazianzus, or the Latins, like Tertullian, Rufinus, Jerome, Augustine and several others as well. For these holy men hated nothing more strongly than that verbose contentiousness, where anger is more the driving force than reason, and idle praise for linguistic performance and memory is the goal rather than the search for the truth. For indeed, while those disputants cheat with words, they attempt nothing other than to oppress humankind with Pharisaic hypocrisy. Hence, if one is not deceived by their word, one must be, as the Apostle James puts it, perfect.

This text is clearly influenced by a number of Neoplatonic ideas as Agrippa had learned them. The distinction between scientific knowledge and divine knowledge constitutes an obvious thematic link with the texts of Reuchlin discussed above. But there is another, and more direct, tie with Neoplatonism: Agrippa has borrowed the division of the three ways of reasoning, with the remarkable definition of scholasticism as a kind of 'scepticism,' from the foreword to Marsilio Ficino's *De voluptate*. *De voluptate* is an early writing, which presents a

synopsis of the opinions concerning pleasure held by philosophers throughout the ages. In his foreword, Ficino explicitly says that he will not offer his own views because Plato forbids young people to formulate judgments which will inevitably have to be altered at a more mature age. This code requires, according to Ficino, a specific method of reasoning, and in this context he mentions the three possible methods of reasoning in philosophy:

Tria vero sunt ut hinc potissimum exordiamur apud philosophos disserendi genera: unum quo certam aliquam quaestionis partem disputando defendimus atque approbamus, ut Peripatetici, ac Stoici effecere; alterum quo quaestione proposita diversas ad id, quod quaeritur sententias rationesque referimus, ut propositis pluribus, invicemque collatis, quid ex iis probabilius, verisimiliusque appareat eligamus, quo Academici, ac Socratici pene omnes utebantur. Tertium vero genus Scepticorum maxime proprium est, qui cum omnia indifferentia esse putent, nec certum, aut probabile habebant quicquam quod sequantur, ea enim, quae naturae ordine seiuncta distinctaque sunt confundunt atque permiscent ab excellentioribus, quibusque philosophis reiiciuntur. (Ficino, *Opera omnia*, vol. 1, p. 986)

Let us begin by saying that there are three kinds of reasoning. The first kind is the kind wherein we defend, by argument and by demonstration, any given position in a question, as the Peripateticians and the Stoics did. The second kind is that by which we describe the various opinions and arguments concerning the question that is posed; after we have reviewed and mutually compared a number of them we choose that which seems most plausible and convincing. This kind was used by almost every follower of the Academic and Socratic school. The third kind is typical of the Sceptics; since they believe that everything is all the same and they have nothing certain or any plausible rule to follow, they mix up and confuse things which are by the order of nature separate and distinct. They are rejected by every one of the best philosophers.

The first two kinds of philosophic reasoning mentioned by Ficino refer to the two literary forms of philosophic prose known in antiquity, namely the essay or continuous form of speech, used by such philosophers as Aristotle and Seneca, and the dialogue, which was the standard form of the Platonic school and Academics like Cicero. The third form, contemptuously labelled as sceptical, refers to the scholastic method of reasoning by means of syllogisms.

Agrippa adopts Ficino's threefold division, and in particular expands his definition of the method of reasoning used by the scholastics or 'sceptics.' More specifically, Agrippa emphasizes the angry spirit of controversy with which the scholastics exchange arguments (see, for instance, Agrippa's use of the term '*homines rixosi ac meretriculis loquatiores*' in the definition of the third kind, which does not occur in Ficino's definition). More importantly, Agrippa underpins Ficino's statement with a tight and coherent network of Christian authorities to illustrate how scholasticism as a method to study theology must be rejected. On the whole, these texts stress the discrepancy between faith and reason, and argue that rational argumentation in matters relating to faith promotes estrangement from the goal.

The nucleus of these testimonies is formed by three Biblical texts, namely James 3, 15, Titus 3, 9 and 2 Timothy 2, 23. These passages take aim at the pagans and criticize them as foolish men who strive for earthly things and rely on human reason, while they neglect altogether the true wisdom which stems from the Christian life led in a spirit of humility. The application of these Biblical texts to the scholastics is supported by a few lines from St. Jerome's notes on Titus 3, 9. According to Jerome, Paul had in mind three groups of men who do not seek God in the proper way, namely the Jews, the heretics, and finally the pagan philosophers. St. Jerome's long note is mainly a diatribe against the Jews; furthermore, it contains an exhortation to Christians to ignore the fussy disputes over the Mosaic Law, and in general not to engage in verbal conflicts or to get involved in legal strife. According to St. Jerome, the Jews boast that they know the letter of the law, but they fail to understand its spirit for lack of Christ's guidance. In the course of this discussion, he observes that the ignorance of the Jews engenders contentiousness of speech, which Paul refers to, and he compares it to the disputes of the dialecticians, who hold endless debates, using empty words and reasoning in the form of syllogisms. It is from this last passage that Agrippa cites the words which are appropriate to his point, but of course, in his context, it is the scholastic theologians who are criticized, not the Jews.

Agrippa amplifies the Biblical condemnation of dialecticians by a series of additional references to important authors from the early Church, namely the theological orations of St. Gregory of Nazianzus, an encyclical letter of Athanasius to the bishops of Egypt and Libya, a brief, anonymous treatise on the Trinity, commonly attrib-

uted to Ambrose, and finally an unidentified letter of Pope Urban to the Antiochians. The texts of St. Gregory, Athanasius and the Pseudo-Ambrose deal with a question that is often dealt with in early Christian texts, namely the way in which Christians should defend their belief against the attacks of the pagans, and more specifically the problem of heresy within the Christian community. In the encyclical letter of Athanasius, Agrippa possibly has in mind specially chapter 18, where, in a large section dealing with the problem of heresies, Athanasius points out that Christians must defend themselves against heretics not by rational arguments, but by simple faith. As to the reference to St. Gregory, Agrippa means to refer not to the second oration, which deals with God in His unity and trinity, but to the first one, which contains an attack against the Eunomians, a sect of heretics reputed for their inclination to debate. In his attack on the Eunomians, St. Gregory stresses that rational debate about God destroys the way to piety, degrades the mystery of Christ into something technical, and is furthermore ineffective in the effort to refute the heathen. Finally, Agrippa refers to the anonymous writing, commonly attributed to Ambrose, which opposes the doctrine of the Arians concerning the Trinity. A few passages in particular have bearing on the point that Agrippa is making, namely chapter 10, where the author stresses that human wisdom is not capable of understanding the Trinity, but that faith is (*Patrologia Latina*, vol. 17, 548; the author uses specially 1 Corinthians 2, 5 and 13); chapter 13, where the author repeats that the doctrine on the Trinity must be believed, and not rationally investigated (*Patrologia Latina*, vol. 17, 553); and chapters 14–16, where the author discusses and stresses in general terms that devotion and faith form the proper way to approach the divine mystery (*Patrologia Latina*, vol. 17, 555–558).

In short, the patristic texts referred to by Agrippa stress the opposition of faith and reason. In this context, they contain a summons to Christians not to entertain differences of opinion about things which can only be understood by faith, and to give evidence of their faith by practising piety and speaking respectfully about God, rather than by arguing about Him purposelessly and endlessly. Agrippa goes on to underscore that the thoughts explained in these texts are authoritative, pointing out that relevant quotations from the Church Fathers are incorporated in the collections of both Church and Roman civil law. He thus suggests that the rejection of the scholastic method can be based not only on the advice of theologians, but is even sanctioned

by the legislative authorities. Agrippa was a man of strong opinions, but he was indeed always ready to listen to the other side and enter into meaningful debate with his opponents, when they gave him the chance.

De triplici ratione cognoscendi Deum, *chapter five*

The second text which we will consider more closely was written soon after the Pavia lecture, namely the *Liber* (or *Sermo*) *de triplici ratione cognoscendi Deum*. Like Reuchlin's *De verbo mirifico*, this treatise deals with the three ways to know God. Of primary interest here is the fact that it confirms the categorical rejection of scholasticism formulated in the Pavia lecture. It also contains several fine examples of Agrippa's intensive use of the Bible to clarify his thoughts and specially to criticize contemporary scholastic theologians.

The *Liber* starts with a poignant description of the disaster which befell man as a result of the Fall (chapter one). Man lost his share in wisdom and perpetual life, was no longer free of sin and fell victim to misery, ignorance and death. This somber introductory sketch owes much to Romans 1–3, where Paul states that justice cannot be secured by paganism or the law of judaism, but solely by faith in Christ, and also to some passages from Hermetic literature which depict the rule of man's earthly passions over his divine mind and his estrangement from God.²³

In chapter two, Agrippa explains that God invites man, languishing in his earthly desolation, to learn to know and to love Him. To that end, He has given man three ways or 'books.' The first is destined for the heathen, who live under the law of nature, the second for the Jews, who live under the law of the Old Testament, the third for the Christians, to whom the revelation of Christ is quintessential. As Agrippa states here, he finds a clear reference to these three ways in the account of the transfiguration of Jesus as given by the evangelists (Matthew 17, 1–5; Mark 9, 1–6 and Luke 9, 28–36).²⁴

Agrippa discusses these ways one by one in chapters three through

²³ Marginal notes in *Collected Treatises*, fol. F 3^v, refer to *Pimander*, 12, and *Asclepius*, 9.

²⁴ The marginal notes of *Collected Treatises*, fol. F 4^v, refer only to Matthew and Mark; *De triplici ratione cognoscendi Deum* (ed. Zambelli), p. 147. Agrippa stresses the occurrence of the number three in the three tabernacles which Peter wanted to build on the mountain, namely one for Christ, one for Moses and one for Elijah.

five. The detailed examination of the third way, in chapter five, consists of a definition of Christianity. Two parts of this definition stand out, namely the characterisation of faith as a necessary tool to know God, and, in close relationship with this representation of faith, the description of scholastic theologians as men who lack this basic requirement.²⁵ With regard to this last point, this text is particularly remarkable, because it is one of the most lengthy (and possibly the most powerful) vituperations of scholasticism that Agrippa ever wrote. Since this text was written, as far as we can tell, without any concrete polemical purpose in mind, it brings out clearly Agrippa's unconditional rejection of the system of scholastic theology as such; it is thus comparable to the passages from Reuchlin's *De verbo mirifico*, quoted and discussed above.

Examination of this text reveals the notion that faith is the proper instrument to know God. This idea is developed by means of a long series of quotations and references to Biblical and patristic texts (for instance, Hebrews 11, 3; Romans 1, 5; 1 Corinthians 2, 4; St. Gregory of Nazianzus, first theological oration). Agrippa stresses that the possession of faith implies that man's mind frees itself from the impediments of the body, in order that it may be united with God. Agrippa shows that both Biblical and Neoplatonist texts mention the desirability of the union between the human mind and God. In this context, he cites and comments on Jeremiah 9, 23 ('But rather, let him who glories, glory in this, that in his prudence he knows me') and on the expression 'to be born (again) from God,' used by John the Apostle.²⁶ He also cites James 5, 17–18, a passage discussing the beneficial influence of the mind that has been united with God upon the actions of the body,²⁷ and a brief poem in Greek, attributed to Zoroaster and translated by Ficino, describing the union of the soul with God.²⁸

²⁵ Chapter 5, *Collected Treatises*, fols. G 2^r–H 3^v; *De triplici ratione cognoscendi Deum* (ed. Zambelli), pp. 154–158. Zambelli's edition includes only the first part of chapter 5, namely fols. G 2^r–G 6^v.

²⁶ 'Ideo huiusmodi animam Iohannes ait nasci iterum ex Deo' (*Collected Treatises*, fols. G 4^{r-v}; *De triplici ratione cognoscendi Deum* [ed. Zambelli], p. 156). The margin of the *Collected Treatises* refers to 1 John 2 and 3. John speaks regularly about being born from God (e.g. 1 John 3, 9 or John 1, 13), but the word 'iterum' never occurs in those passages.

²⁷ *Collected Treatises*, fol. G 4^v; *De triplici ratione cognoscendi Deum* (ed. Zambelli), p. 156.

²⁸ 'Zoroastes' or *Magica (id est philosophica) dicta Magorum ex Zoroastre*, vv. 19–20, in: Kieszowski, *Studi sul platonismo del Rinascimento in Italia*, p. 159.

Within the context of this praise of faith, Agrippa condemns scholasticism as a system that relies solely on intellectual knowledge, disdaining the quintessential importance of faith in the process of knowing God. Agrippa makes this point clear at the beginning of chapter five, a passage whose wording is similar to that of the Pavia lecture (cp. 'litigiosis enim quibusdam altercationum captiunculis ac sophismatum iaculis armati, omnium disciplinarum, etiam sacrarum literarum fores se posse diffingere et penetrare arbitrantur', above, p. 65):

Idcirco frustra currunt quicunque litigiosis quibusque disputationibus divina prosequuntur et sophismatum muniti ambagibus ac dialecticis praestigiis sacrarum literarum fores se diffingere posse putant. Semper quaerunt magna disputantes, nihil tamen inveniunt, quia semet ipsos amittunt et, ut ait Paulus, 'semper discentes et numquam ad scientiam veritatis pervenientes'.²⁹ Hinc idem Paulus praecipit Corinthiis, ut oboediant et firmiter perstent in fide, et caveant ne decipiantur per dialecticam et philosophiam, quae sunt inanes fallaciae et inventa hominum et secundum elementa huius mundi corruptibilis, cuius cognitio omnis est a sensibus, ex quibus ratio omnem suam capit cognitionis materiam, discurrendo, componendo, dividendo et colligendo universales propositiones ex experimentis. (*Collected Treatises*, fol. G 3^r; ed. Zambelli, pp. 154–155)

Therefore those who pursue divine things by means of all kinds of litigious disputations, who believe they can open the doors of Holy Scripture with obscure sophisms and dialectical illusions as their weapons, those people are running around in vain. They are always looking for something important in their disputations, yet they never find anything, because they lose themselves and are, as Paul says, 'always trying to learn but never able to reach the knowledge of the truth.' Therefore Paul also prescribes to the Corinthians that they must obey and stand fast in the faith [cp. 1 Corinthians 1], and take care lest they be cheated by dialectic and philosophy [cp. 2 Timothy 2 and 3], which are idle tricks and human inventions, fashioned after the elements of this corruptible world, whose knowledge can only be secured by the senses, and from which the mind draws all the elements of knowledge by rational discourse, by composing, dividing and inferring general propositions from practical experiments.

In this passage, Agrippa clearly applies to the scholastic theologians the same warnings which St. Paul directed against the heretical teachers

²⁹ 2 Timothy 3, 7.

of gnosticism who were active in Ephesus, and whose teaching, St. Paul stresses, raises vain controversies involving only words and leading away from the truth.

Agrippa goes on to emphasize that the ability to be in communion with God through faith, in other words, to prophesy, is specially important for those who interpret the New Testament. Agrippa justifies this statement by pointing out that the Gospel has (like the Old Testament), a surface meaning and a deeper meaning:

Maxime ergo condecens est illa potestas illos qui perfectiores in fide quibus Paulus solum se dicit narrare sapientiam et segregatim praedicare Evangelium. Habet enim etiam Evangelium, quemadmodum lex mosaica, aliud in cortice propositum imbecilioribus, aliud in medulla, quod segregatim revelatum est perfectis, sicut de illis loquitur Paulus ad Hebraeos vocans haec lac infantium et elementa exordii sermonum Dei, illa autem nuncupat solidum cibum, sermonem iustitiae et perfectam Christi doctrinam. (*Collected Treatises*, fols. G 5^{r-v}; ed. Zambelli, p. 157)

Thus, that ability is very fitting for those who are perfect in faith, for whom solely, as distinct from the rest of humankind, St. Paul declares that he is speaking of wisdom and preaching the Gospel [cp. 1 Corinthians 2, 6]. For the Gospel has, like the Mosaic law, a surface message, destined for the weak, and a profound message, which is disclosed separately to those who are the most mature. Thus, St. Paul speaks about these messages in his letter to the Hebrews, by calling the first milk for children [cp. Hebrews 5, 13], that is, the first elements of the beginning of God's words, and the second solid food [cp. Hebrews 5, 14], that is, the word of justice and the complete doctrine of Christ [cp. Hebrews 6, 1-2].

The paraphrase of St. Paul's words in Hebrews 6, 1-2: 'Therefore, let us leave behind the basic teaching about Christ and advance to maturity ['perfectiora'], without laying the foundation all over again: repentance from dead works and faith in God, instruction about baptism and laying on of hands, resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment,' continues; Agrippa uses St. Paul's enumeration of the elements of the basic teaching concerning Christ to turn the focus toward scholastic theology:

... quae omnia habentur in cortice Evangelii, et in scholis tractantur a scholasticis theologis, et in problemata disputanda et discutienda deducuntur. (*Collected Treatises*, fol. G 5^v; ed. Zambelli, p. 157)

... all of which things [namely repentance from dead works, etc.] are included on the surface of the Gospel and are treated in the schools by the scholastic theologians, and taken up as problems to be discussed and solved in disputations.

In this way, Agrippa justifies his contempt for the scholastic theologians with a concrete motive. He then develops the thought that the scholastics are not the true leaders whom the Church needs, because their work is not inspired by the Holy Spirit and faith.³⁰ In this passage, Agrippa uses quotations from various places in the Gospel, namely Romans 2, 19–20, and 1 Corinthians 14, 2–5, 22–25 and 37–39. This thought is, in its turn, elaborated by means of a typical, very lengthy vituperation of the scholastics, which begins as follows:

Sed sunt quidam alii, qui linguis loquuntur, humanis scientiis inflati, imo qui vita et lingua de Deo mentiri non erubescunt, qui suo spiritu omnem scripturam ad sua mendacia impudentissime torquent ac mysteria divina ad humanae rationis methodum exigunt, inventisque e capitibus suis glossis sacrilegis adulterato verbo Dei sua portenta stabiliunt, ac sanctum theologiae nomen furto et rapina sibi temere usurpant, solisque operam dant contentionibus et rixosis disputationibus. (*Collected Treatises*, fol. G 6^v; not in Zambelli's anthology)

But there exist men who, made arrogant by their human knowledge, speak in tongues, yes who are even not ashamed to lie about God in the actions of their lives and their speech, who pervert most impudently with their own spirit all the Scripture to suit their falsehoods, who adjust the divine mysteries to the methods of human reason, who defend their monstrosities by fictions concocted in their heads and by sacrilegious glosses adulterating the word of God, who audaciously rob and plunder the name of theology and call it their own, who concentrate their attention on mere verbal strife and combative disputations.

This categorical statement against scholasticism is supported by four Biblical testimonies dealing with various kinds of irreligion and non-believers, namely Philippians 1, 15: 'Of course, some preach Christ from envy and rivalry, others from good will'; Psalm 14 (13 in the Vulgate), 1: 'Fools say in their hearts, 'There is no God.' Their deeds are loathsome and corrupt; not one does what is right;' Jude 10: 'But these people revile what they do not understand and are de-

³⁰ *Collected Treatises*, fol. G 6^r; *De triplici ratione cognoscendi Deum* (ed. Zambelli), pp. 157–158.

stroyed by what they know by nature like irrational animals;' and Isaiah 47, 10 and 13: 'Because you felt secure in your wickedness, and said, 'No one sees me,' your wisdom and your knowledge led you astray'; 'You wearied yourself with many consultations.'³¹ Agrippa defines these Biblical statements as rejections of scholasticism and scholastic theologians, and then continues his tirade:

Carnalis enim est et mundana omnis doctrina ipsorum, gens ambitiosa arrogans, confidens suis ingeniis, arbitrans se suis viribus Deum posse cognoscere, et in omni re veritatem posse invenire, nec posse aliquid in sermonem venire, de quo non in utranque partem disertissime possint disputare, et probabilem sententiam proferre populi astuti, abundantes alienis literis, ac simul artificiosa quadam dialectica freti insolentes, cum nihil omnino sciant, cupiunt docti videri. Ideo disputant palam in gymnasiis sophismatum roborati, diverticulis dicentes et arbitantes se esse sapientes, sed his deliramentis ac versatilis ingenii versutiis miserabiliter decepti, quod putant sibi esse subsidio, est illis impedimento, et evanescent in cogitationibus suis, et traduntur a Deo in reprobum sensum, quo putant se maxime videre et veritatem posse invenire, eo maxime obscuratum est insipiens cor ipsorum, quo valent apud homines, <eo> apud Deum impotentes sunt, et 'dicentes se esse sapientes, stulti facti sunt.'³² (*Collected Treatises*, fols. G 7^{r-v}; not in Zambelli's anthology)

Indeed, all their knowledge is sinful and wordly. They are an ambitious and arrogant breed of men, confident in their own intelligence, thinking that they can learn to know God on the strength of their own capacities, that they can discover the truth in everything. They think that nothing can come up in speech, which they, clever as they are, cannot discuss by means of arguments pro and con, and about which they can make statements on the grounds of probability. Abundantly equipped with irrelevant literature and boldly trusting in some artificial dialectic, they wish to seem erudite, whereas in reality they know nothing whatsoever. So they hold public disputes in the universities, fortified and speaking by means of elaborate sophisms, thinking that they are wise. Instead, they have been miserably deceived by these follies and contrivances of the feckless mind, and what they believe to be helpful to them is in reality an impediment, and they lose themselves in their thoughts [cp. Romans 1, 21], they are delivered by God to their undiscerning mind [cp. Romans 1, 28]. The more they believe that they

³¹ *Collected Treatises*, fols. G 6^v–G 7^r.

³² Romans 1, 22.

are visionaries and that they can find the truth, the more their ignorant hearts are blinded. They are worthless in the eyes of God, to the extent that they valuable in the eyes of men, and 'while claiming to be wise, they have become fools.'

Apart from the comparison of the scholastic theologians with the idolators for whom, on the authority of St. Paul in a forceful passage (Romans 1, 18–32) severe punishment awaits, Agrippa quotes several more Biblical texts to reinforce his condemnation, namely Sirach (Ecclesiasticus) 37, 23–24: 'Whoever speaks as a sophist is hateful, he will be deceived in every way. To this man divine grace is not given, he has been robbed of all wisdom'; 1 Corinthians 3, 19: 'For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in the eyes of God'; Proverbs 9, 13 and 18: 'The woman Folly is fickle, she is inane, and knows nothing,' 'in the depths of the nether world are her guests'; 1 Corinthians 1, 19: 'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the learning of the learned I will set aside'; Titus 1, 1, where it is said that St. Paul is an apostle of Christ 'for the sake of the faith of God's chosen ones,' and 3, 9: 'Avoid foolish arguments, genealogies, rivalries, and quarrels about the law; for they are useless and futile.' The two citations of Titus are presented by Agrippa in conjunction with the commentary from St. Jerome (Patrologia Latina, vol. 26, 592–593 and 631), who himself relates Titus 3, 9 to the Aristotelian dialecticians.³³ Thus, Agrippa ensures that his categorical rejection of scholastic theology on Biblical grounds is seen to be firmly rooted in the patristic tradition.

On the other hand, he briefly elaborates, in the same passage, on the characteristic of true wisdom, which is constituted by steadfast and tranquil faith ('fides fixa et tranquilla'). To comment on the characteristics of the kind of faith required, Agrippa refers to several early Christian texts, namely the pseudo-Ambrosian treatise on the Trinity (a text which he had already used in the Pavia lecture), and Ambrosius's treatise *On faith* (Patrologia Latina, vol. 16, 559). Additionally, Agrippa refers to a passage against dialectic, taken from a letter by Pope Adrian I to Charlemagne.³⁴ Agrippa rounds off his list of testimonies by repeating several statements of St. Paul and James

³³ *Collected Treatises*, fols. G 7^v–G 8^r.

³⁴ The margin of the *Collected Treatises*, fol. G 8^r, indicates that the passage is cited from D. 37 c. 6. Agrippa attributed this letter, in conformity with his source, to Pope Urban; see Friedberg's note ad loc.

against verbal strife.³⁵ He then elaborates his critique of human reason by advancing the thesis that the devil is responsible for the fact that man has developed the capacity to misuse his reason. The ground for this thesis is Agrippa's analysis of Genesis 3, describing the devil's successful effort to convince Eve to be disobedient to God.³⁶ Agrippa was to develop this idea in the context of the declamation *De originali peccato*, and we shall return to it in our chapter on that declamation. What is specially relevant here, however, is that Agrippa once more voices his abhorrence of scholastic theology by identifying the devil's deception of Eve with the methods of scholasticism. It is a typical passage, amply illustrating Agrippa's attitude, and therefore worth reading attentively:

Vides quomodo callida illa et diabolica ex quaestionibus proposita disceptatio decepit rationem, ratio autem deicit fidem. Hic fructus, haec utilitas, hic finis disputationum sophisticarum, quae hoc tempore a recentioribus aliquot theosophistis ac philopompis exercentur, ad omnem vanitatem, qui cum Aristotelem male conversum et quaedam insuper commentaria tum Petrum Lombardum, quem magistrum sententiarum vocant, ac neglecto Christi Evangelio apostolicisque dogmatibus, tanquam totius theologiae architypum colunt, et nescio quae alia illius generis viderunt. Tunc freti sophistica sua insolentia, omnia se posse attentare, aggredi, dissolvere et interpretari putant. Tunc irruentes suis ineptiis, inquinamentis et blacteramentis, rixosisque disputationibus ad quod artificium iam linguas armatas habent. Omnia quae in fide et religione simplicia, syncera, et pura sunt multiplicia, caliginosa et sordida reddiderunt, omnemque theologiam suis absurdis altercationibus ac futili verbositate confuderunt, conturbarunt, polluerunt, inveneruntque non divinam nec humanam quidem, sed nescio quam suam, non dico theologiam, sed squalidam, odiosam, cavillatoriam et diabolicam vanitatem, humanarum opinionum, philosophicarumque nugarum rhapsodiam. (*Collected Treatises*, fols. G 8^v–H 1^r; not in Zambelli's anthology)

You see how this cunning and devilish discussion arising from the *quaestiones* has deceived human reason, and how reason has deceived faith.

³⁵ *Collected Treatises*, fol. G 8^r. In the margin are references to 1 Corinthians 1 and 2 (a section on the importance of the message of the cross versus the wisdom of the world), 2 Timothy 2, 14 (on useless disputes), Titus 3, 9 and James 3, 15. There is also a reference to an unspecified commentary on Colossians 2 (where St. Paul warns the congregation at Colossae against heretical teachers), and to St. Jerome's commentary on Titus 3, 9.

³⁶ *Collected Treatises*, fols. G 8^{r-v}.

This is the outcome, this is the benefit, this is the goal of the disputations of the sophists, which are being argued nowadays, solely for the sake of vanity, by the contemporary theologians, who are deluded and ostentatious. They neglect the Gospel and the precepts of the apostles, and consider Aristotle, in poor translations, and some commentaries on Aristotle on the one hand, and Peter Lombard, whom they call the 'magister sententiarum,' and whatever else of that kind they have studied on the other hand, as the paradigms of theology in a nutshell. They believe they are able to deal with everything, solve every problem, interpret every text, relying on their sophistical insolence and rushing in with their absurdities, their vulgarities, their rubbish and their quarrelsome disputations, for which craft they keep their tongues ready at all times. Everything in faith and religion that is simple, lucid and pure, they have made complicated, confused and polluted. With their absurd discussions and their useless wordiness they have made theology, in all its aspects, muddled and soiled, and they have invented something of their own, which is neither a divine nor a human theology, but a sordid, hateful, pedantic and devilish vainglory, a rhapsody of human opinions and philosophical trifles.

In the last pages of chapter 5 of *De triplici ratione cognoscendi Deum*,³⁷ written in the same aggressive style as the previous pages, but lacking their multitude of illustrative quotations and references, Agrippa repeats yet again his negative judgment of scholasticism. In these pages, he adds a practical element to his earlier observations, in that he attacks the habit of theologians and writers of canonical texts of dividing their writings meticulously into chapters and paragraphs, and of constantly citing verbatim not only ancient testimonies but also recent and even contemporary ones. He ascribes this to two infirmities on the part of the theologians. First, their fastidious way of dividing and subdividing their writings proves that they are aware of their own ignorance, and they therefore fear that their readers will not believe them. Second, the constant practice of citing contemporary authors proves that their goal is not to teach others, but simply to serve their own glory and show off with their knowledge.³⁸

In the midst of all this, Agrippa briefly accounts for those authors who incorporate the true and venerated theology of the early Church, who are disdained by modern theologians, and he emphasizes that these revered men, unlike the scholastics, were secure in God's grace

³⁷ *Collected Treatises*, fols. H 1^r–H 3^v.

³⁸ *Collected Treatises*, fols. H 2^r–v.

and were aware of their wisdom. Therefore, their writings include only occasional citations, and then only from the Old and New Testaments and the Gospels. In this manner, the ancient theologians truly imitated Christ and disseminated the fruit of genuine religion and faith among the people.³⁹

We shall now return to these remarks concerning the ancient theologians, and relate them to similar remarks made by Agrippa in the Pavia lecture and in a passage from *De incertitudine*.

3. Agrippa's alternative to scholastic theology

Usefulness of human discourse on divine matters

Agrippa's Neoplatonic ideas imply that in the last resort, any exchange of ideas concerning the divine is meaningless and impossible. To understand this thought, it is useful to have recourse once more to *De incertitudine*. In chapter 100, dealing with the Word of God, Agrippa asserts that it is impossible to know the truth in theological matters, unless one is a person

qui habeat clavem scientiae et discretionis. Clausum enim est veritatis armarium, variisque obductum mysteriis atque ipsis etiam sapientibus et sanctis praeclusum qua ad tantum, tam incomprehensum thesaurum nobis paretur ingressus. Clavis autem haec sola est, nec quicquam aliud, quam verbum Dei. (*De incertitudine*, ed. 1531, fol. 151^r; *Opera*, p. 297)

who has the key of knowledge and wisdom. For the treasury of the truth is closed, hidden as it is with various mysteries, and even to the wise and holy men the road is obstructed by which we obtain access to such an important and misinterpreted treasury. This key stands wholly by itself, and it is no other than the word of God.

'Clavis scientiae,' which Agrippa derived in this passage from Luke 11, 52 (clavis scientiae), refers to the messianic truth that opens the kingdom of God to the believers (cp. Agrippa's use of the term 'clavis scientiae' in the final chapter of *De incertitudine*, quoted below, chapter 3, p. 110). Agrippa uses the notion here to make a distinction between those who understand only the surface meaning of the Bible

³⁹ *Collected Treatises*, fols. H 1^{r-v}; H 2^v.

and those who, by virtue of their faith, perceive its profound meaning. It is interesting to note, in passing, that Agrippa used the Biblical notion of 'clavis' also to distinguish false and true magic: he calls the spiritual understanding ('intellectus'), which becomes more profound as the mind becomes more free from its earthly bounds, the key ('clavis') to occult philosophy (*Epistolae*, 5, 19, d.d. 19 November 1527, p. 880). In this sense, Agrippa twice wrote to friends, with reference to *De occulta philosophia*, that ultimately the key to this work in progress would be reserved for himself and to his closest friends, who, led by their faith, had a profound, divine understanding of the occult operations.⁴⁰ One of these letters (5, 14) was actually printed in the 1533 edition of *De occulta philosophia*. In later times, it was common among scholars to believe that Agrippa had in mind, with his reference to a 'key' to *De occulta philosophia*, a famous, but anonymous sixteenth-century handbook of black magic, containing guidelines for the invocation of spirits. Hence, this anonymous writing was believed to have been written by Agrippa, and it was in fact printed as the fourth book of *De occulta philosophia* (first edition in 1559, with many subsequent editions).⁴¹ Thus, this scholarly error confirmed and further disseminated the popular story that Agrippa had been a wicked sorcerer.⁴² It is somewhat ironic that the very terminology which Agrippa used to ensure the orthodoxy of his occultism turned out to be precisely the instrument with which he was consigned to the camp of the apostates.

⁴⁰ Namely *Epistolae*, 3, 56, d.d. 22 January 1524, pp. 759–760, and 5, 14, d.d. 24 September 1527, pp. 873–875. In both letters, Agrippa uses exactly the same expression, namely 'clavem reservare.'

⁴¹ *Henrici Cornelii Agrippae liber quartus de occulta philosophia, seu de ceremoniis magicis. Cui accesserunt, Elementa magica Petri de Abano, philosophi*, Marburg, 1559. The spurious fourth book was usually printed together with the *Magica elementa* of the thirteenth-century Peter of Abano (see also above, Introduction, p. 3).

⁴² See, e.g., Jean Bodin in his influential work *Refutation des opinions de Jean VVier*: 'Et neantmoins il n'y a homme de sain iugement, qui ne confesse, apres avoir leu les livres d'Agrippa, que c'estoit l'un des plus grands sorciers du monde. Ce qui est encores plus evident par les epistres qui sont à la fin des trois livres, *De occulta philosophia*, où il est escrit à un certain Augustin Italien, qu'il avoit reservé la clef de l'Occulte Philosophie à ses amis seulement: qui est le quatriesme livre, que les disciples et amis d'Agrippa ont fait imprimer apres la mort de leur maistre, lequel livre descouvre comme en plein iour le poison detestable de sorcellerie,' etc. (*De la demonomanie des sorciers*, Paris, 1580, fol. 220^r). The letter to the Italian Augustinian (i.e., Agrippa's Antwerp friend Aurelius ab Aquapendente) is *Epistolae*, 5, 14, which was printed at pp. CCCXLVI–CCCXLVIII of the 1533 edition of *De occulta philosophia* (reprinted by Nowotny, 1967). See Nauert, p. 325 and note 11, for some evidence showing that the fourth book contributed substantially to the preservation and diffu-

The importance which Agrippa attaches to the 'clavis scientiae' implies that, strictly speaking, the full range of the revelation is only discernible for those who have overcome all their earthly bonds. Closely linked with this idea is the belief that the Bible is completely autonomous and self-evident. Later on in the same chapter of *De incertitudine*, Agrippa expresses this belief as follows:

Huius scripturae tanta maiestas est, tanta energia, ut nulla externa commentaria, nullas humanas, nec angelicas glossas patiatur [. . .] sed sibi ipsi sufficiens, seipsam exponit et interpretatur. (*De incertitudine*, ed. 1531, fols. 151^{r-v}; *Opera*, p. 298)

The majesty of Scripture is such, its force is such, that it bears no external commentaries, no human or angelical annotations [. . .] but self-sufficient as it is, it explains and interprets itself.

It would, however, be a mistake to conclude from these words, and from Agrippa's emphasis on faith and his corresponding disparagement of human reason, as portrayed in the previous section, that all human discourse about the Word of God is completely impossible and without purpose. For instance, we have seen above how Agrippa observed that scholastic theology can be a useful tool in the theologian's task of refuting heretics. As far as is known, Agrippa nowhere makes a general statement explaining why theology as a rational discipline is useful. In the absence of such a statement, it is possible to gain some insight into Agrippa's thoughts on this matter, both from the way in which he practised theology and from various remarks made in the course of particular texts.

Two general observations are warranted. First, Agrippa considered Biblical exegesis necessary, because for various reasons connected with human imperfection, the Word of God is not always communicated correctly to men. In chapter 99 of *De incertitudine* (On prophets), Agrippa explained this thought in a particularly expressive way by observing that even divinely inspired men such as the Old Testament prophets and the New Testament apostles and evangelists were not infallible, and occasionally failed to see the truth and made involuntary mistakes. As examples of prophets who made errors, Agrippa

sion of Agrippa's reputation as a black magician. Peuckert, *Pansophie*, pp. 127-135, lists a number of points of incompatibility between the three books of *De occulta philosophia* and the spurious fourth book, thus strongly arguing that this last book could not have been written by Agrippa.

mentions Moses, who did not keep his promise to lead the people of Israel, Jonas, who failed to anticipate God's change of plan when he proclaimed that Nineveh would be destroyed within forty days (Jonah 3, 4–10), and Peter, who was reprimanded by St. Paul.⁴³ This line of argument, incidentally, gives rise to a bold, shocking statement, borrowed from St. Paul, that serves to underpin the main thought of *De incertitudine*: 'omnis homo mendat' [every man lies] (Romans 3, 4).⁴⁴ In the same chapter Agrippa also points out that even the corpus of Holy Books is not without imperfection, since some books are lost, while others have not been accepted as canonical. Some examples of the first category are the Book of the Wars of the Lord, mentioned in Numbers 21, 14, the Book of Jashar, mentioned in Joshua 10, 13, and the numerous apocryphal Biblical texts.⁴⁵

Secondly, Biblical exegesis is useful because man must study God's Word not only in order to preserve his private relationship with the Creator, but also because it helps him in his relationship with his fellow men. Thus, Agrippa considered the four traditional forms of Biblical exegesis (literal, moral, tropological, anagogical), to which he added the 'sensus typicus,' practised by theologians like Cyril,⁴⁶ Methodius,⁴⁷ Ioachim Abbas⁴⁸ and G. Savonarola (1452–1498), and the 'expositio physica' or 'naturalis,' practised by Jewish theologians, as useful ways to teach and educate the people.⁴⁹ It will become

⁴³ *De incertitudine*, ed. 1531, fols. 149^{r-v}; *Opera*, pp. 294–295.

⁴⁴ *De incertitudine*, ed. 1531, fols. 149^v–150^r; *Opera*, p. 295.

⁴⁵ *De incertitudine*, ed. 1531, fols. 150^{r-v}; *Opera*, p. 296.

⁴⁶ Possibly St. Cyril, patriarch of Alexandria, d. 444, author of exegetical works and commentaries on the Old and New Testament. In *De triplici ratione cognoscendi Deum*, chapter 5, Agrippa specially praises his commentary on John (*Collected Treatises*, fol. H 1^v).

⁴⁷ Possibly St. Methodius, bishop of Tyre (third century CE), to whom were attributed commentaries on Genesis and Song of Songs; see J. Trithemius, *De scriptoribus ecclesiasticis*, consulted in: Fabricius, *Bibliotheca ecclesiastica* (. . .), p. 19, no. lx.

⁴⁸ Joachim Florensis or Joachim of Fiore (d. 1202), author of commentaries on several books of the Old and New Testament; see J. Trithemius, *De scriptoribus ecclesiasticis*, consulted in: Fabricius, *Bibliotheca ecclesiastica* (. . .), p. 98, no. cccxxxix, and *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, s.n.: Joachim v. Fiore.

⁴⁹ *De incertitudine*, chapter 98 (On interpretive theology), ed. 1531, fols. 146^{r-v}; ed. *Opera*, pp. 287–288. The 'sensus typicus' is defined as the meaning 'ad temporum vicissitudines, regnorum mutationes, et saeculorum restitutiones omnia referens' [the meaning which relates everything to the vicissitudes of time, the changes in monarchies and the restoration of the ages]. The 'expositio physica' is defined as a method which 'in ipsis sacris literis ipsius universi et sensibilis mundi totiusque naturae, ac mundanae fabricae vires virtutesque exquirat' [explores in the very text of the Holy Scripture the forces and energies of the universe itself, the material world, all of nature and the earthly fabric].

clear that, in a broader context, Agrippa also valued those authors who probe the profound meaning of Scripture in a more varied range of textual forms than Biblical exegesis. This involves, in practice, authors who write on the mystical sense of the Bible.

Who are the good theologians?

If Agrippa believed that men, in their search for God, can be assisted by human explanations concerning the divine, then the next question concerns the identity of the authors who have made useful contributions in this field. In light of Agrippa's bitter condemnation of scholasticism, one is tempted to assume simply that Agrippa valued all those theologians who do not apply the scholastic method. This is certainly true in general, but some more specific criteria can also be formulated. Agrippa listed on several occasions names of theologians, and in some cases, specific writings, which he considered of exceptional value.

Before going on to the names of theologians and writings which Agrippa valued highly, it will be useful to develop in greater detail the above general observations on the basis of two passages from Agrippa's polemic with the Dominican Salin on the triple marriage of Saint Anne. These passages indeed provide further insight into the criteria which mattered to Agrippa in the field of divine studies. The first passage shows, once more, that the Bible is the necessary starting-point of all human discourse on divine matters, and that the ultimate aim is to understand the profound, hidden meaning of the Biblical text. The second passage demonstrates that Agrippa considers the theologians of the early Church as, in principle, more important than the later theologians, because they were closer in time to the source of Christianity, and therefore had a clearer, less obstructed perception of the Revelation.

Lefèvre's essay had caused such a stir (as noted above, it was condemned by the Sorbonne immediately after its publication) because it constituted a challenge to the Roman Church not only on the level of its scholarly tradition, but also on that of popular worship and its pastoral practice. This practical implication was an important motive for Agrippa to present himself as a strong advocate of Lefèvre's argument, because he opposed the contemporary exaggerated worship of saints (as is clear, e.g., from certain passages in *De incertitudine*), and because he considered sexual moderation in marriage generally,

and chaste widowhood in particular, as important evangelical virtues which should be practised by all Christians. The actual discussion between Agrippa and Salin dealt mainly with interpretation of the relevant Biblical passages.

One of the details of the argument concerns the question whether the word 'soror' in the relevant texts must be taken literally or metaphorically. In this context, Agrippa made a point which it is useful to consider here. According to the Dominican, to allow metaphorical interpretations was to open the gateway to all kinds of distortion of the Biblical text by way of ambiguity.⁵⁰ Agrippa for his part claims that his opponent's point of view amounts to the views held by the ancient heretic Helvidius, against whom St. Jerome had written. He stresses that it is much more in line with orthodoxy to believe that the Bible's true meaning is not represented by its literal sense, but rather by its profound spirit. As testimonies to this view, Agrippa cites two passages, one from St. Jerome's commentary on St. Paul's letter to the Galatians and one from Hilarius:

Non in verbis scripturarum (ut ait Hieronymus super epistolam ad Galathas)⁵¹ est evangelium, sed in sensu, non in superficie, sed in medulla. Et Hilarius ait: intelligentia dictorum ex causis est assumenda dicendi, quia non sermoni res, sed rei est sermo subiectus.⁵² (*Defensio*, fol. E v^r)

As Jerome says in his commentary on Galatians, the message of Christ rests not in the words of Scripture, but in its sense, not in its surface, but in its marrow. And Hilarius says: the meaning of words must be inferred from the reasons for which one gives voice to things, because the matter is not subject to the language, but rather the language to the matter.

In order to drive home his point, Agrippa draws his opponent's attention to the fact that the principle of metaphoric explanation had also been accepted by William of Ockham, a theologian whose authority Salin would certainly wish to accept with enthusiasm.⁵³ Agrippa concludes his remark with a succinct statement defining his position:

⁵⁰ *Defensio*, fol. E iv^v.

⁵¹ *Commentaria in epistolam ad Galatas*, 1, 1; ad Gal. 1, 11–12 (*Patrologia Latina*, vol. 26, 322).

⁵² Hilary of Poitiers, *De trinitate*, 4, 14, ed. P. Smulders, CSEL, vol. 62, p. 116.

⁵³ Agrippa cites from Ockham's *Dialogus de imperio et pontificia potestate, secunda pars* (*Defensio*, fols. E v^r–v).

Lege Augustinum in libris de doctrina Christiana⁵⁴ et in opere de locutionibus,⁵⁵ et docebit te. Disce scripturae absconditos sensus intelligere non e scholasticis summulis, cantionibus, postillis, dictionariis et ex huius generis luridis collectaneis, aut e sordidis quibusdam et pridie natis auctoribus, sed ex seipsa semetipsam declarante, ubi locum obscurum aliorum collatio elucidat, tum ex veterum commentariis, et priscis illis interpretibus, qui proxime biberunt de fontibus. Horum purissima aqua, tuis faeculentis lacunis obmissis, tibi bibenda est, ut scias discernere sensus scripturarum, nisi palatum et linguam tanta bili habeas infecta, ut bonae literae tibi non sapiant id quod sunt, sed quod vitiatum organum secum circumfert. (*Defensio*, fols. E vi^r-v)

Read Augustine in his books on Christian doctrine and in his work on the expressions in the Heptateuch, and he will teach you. Learn to understand the hidden meanings of Scripture not from the scholastic *summulae*, *cantiones*, notes, dictionaries and other ghastly compilations of that sort, nor from any third-rate authors of the past, but from the Bible itself, which elucidates itself whenever an obscure passage is clarified by the comparison with another passage, and secondly from the commentaries of the ancient authors and the earliest interpreters, who drew their inspiration from the very sources. The pure water you must drink from these sources, turning away from the dregs of your own puddles, in order that you may learn to discern the meaning of Scripture—unless your palate and tongue are so infected with bile that the good letters [i.e., the Church Fathers] do not taste for you as they truly are, but rather as your own infected palate and tongue cause them to taste.

Agrippa stresses here that if an obscure passage in Scripture cannot be clarified by means of other passages from Scripture itself, those authors must be used who drew their inspiration from Scripture. But who are these authors? Another passage in the same discussion helps provide an answer.

An important point in the discussion concerning the *trinubium* concerns the authority of Eusebius (and Hegesippus, who is often cited by Eusebius) versus that of modern Church historians and Biblical

⁵⁴ Ed. G.M. Green, CSEL, vol. 80. Agrippa is thinking specifically of book 3, which deals with the various kinds of ambiguity of Scripture. One kind of ambiguity is caused by the metaphorical use of language, a topic treated in detail by Augustine.

⁵⁵ *De locutionibus in Heptateuchum libri septem*, ed. I. Zycha, CSEL, vol. 28, part 1, pp. 507–624. This work comprises explanatory notes to difficult passages in the Latin translation of the seven books of the Heptateuch.

exegetes, as sources for the history of Saint Anne. Salin had asserted, as we have seen above, that the word 'soror' used in the Bible to describe the relation between Maria Cleophae and the Virgin Mary, has to be taken literally.⁵⁶ He not only supported his point of view with the authority of St. Jerome,⁵⁷ but also by quoting a number of standard modern authorities.⁵⁸ Thus, he mentioned the *glossa interlinearis*,⁵⁹ the influential exegetical work of Hugh of St. Cher (or Hugo Cardinalis, c. 1190–1263)⁶⁰ and Thomas Aquinas,⁶¹ the Church History of Peter Comestor (12th century),⁶² Antonius Florentinus (1389–1459),⁶³ and the Catalog of Saints of Pietro de Natali (or Petrus de Natalibus, d. 1406).⁶⁴ All these authors, Salin pointed out, are no less trustworthy and approved than Eusebius and Hegesippus, the two key authorities on whom Agrippa had relied.

In response to this objection, Agrippa vigorously defends the two Church Fathers. Agrippa first responds that Salin had misinterpreted St. Jerome.⁶⁵ More importantly, for our purposes, Agrippa stresses that modern theologians may well be upright men ('probi viri'), but they must be considered inferior to Eusebius and Hegesippus in the field of early Church history because they are less erudite and because they lived in a far later age:

⁵⁶ *Defensio*, fol. D i^v.

⁵⁷ Ibid. Salin uses Jerome's treatise *De perpetua virginitate B. Mariae adversus Helvidium liber unus* (Patrologia Latina, vol. 23, 193–215).

⁵⁸ *Defensio*, fols. D iij^r–D iiij^r.

⁵⁹ Salin cites from the gloss on Matthew 13, 55 (Patrologia Latina, vol. 162, 1377) and Mark 6 (this last reference is unclear).

⁶⁰ Salin cites from Hugh's notes on John 2 and Matthew 1. Hugh's commentaries on the Bible were widely used from the Middle Ages to the eighteenth century (see, e.g. Hugo Cardinalis, *Opera omnia in universum vetus et novum testamentum* [. . .] *Opus admirabile omnibus concionatoribus ac sacrae Theologiae doctoribus pernecessarium, in quo declarantur sensus omnes, literalis scilicet, allegoricus, tropologicus, & anagogicus, maxima cum studentium utilitate*, 8 vols., Venice, 1703).

⁶¹ Salin refers to Thomas with the usual expression 'Doctor Angelicus.' He cites from Thomas's *Lectura super Epistolas S. Pauli* (modern edition by R. Cai, O.P., 2 vols., Rome–Turin, 1953).

⁶² Salin cites from the *Evangelica historia*, which forms part of Peter Comestor's *Handbook of Church History*, the *Historia scholastica* (Patrologia Latina, vol. 198, 1049–1722; here 1537–1722).

⁶³ He is the author of a *Summa theologica* which was widely read in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. It is unclear to which of Antonius's works Salin refers. See on Antonius, *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique*, s.n.: Antonin (Saint).

⁶⁴ Salin cites from the entry 'Anna' in Petrus de Natalibus's *Catalogus sanctorum et gestorum* [Catalog of Saints].

⁶⁵ *Defensio*, fols. D ij^r–v.

Non tamen infitior esse illos probos viros et catholicos Ecclesiae doctores, sed ob tenuitatem doctrinae eruditionisque inopiam longe infirmiori gradu atque loco sepositos, et in minori pretio habendos, quam Egesippum et Eusebium (quos tu ideo non habes in pretio, quia non didicisti nec intelligis), quibus in recensendis historiis plus fidei est quam illorum tuorum recentiorum sexcentis, quorum musta facile contemnit qui priscorum illorum vetus vinum cum suavitate bibit. (*Defensio*, fol. D iiij^v)

I do not deny that these are upright doctors of the Church who teach its doctrine in its entirety, but I think that on account of the slowness of their learning and poverty of their erudition, they are incomparably inferior and must be considered of less value than Hegesippus and Eusebius, whom you do not value because you are not acquainted with them and do not understand them. In the examination of historical facts they are more trustworthy than the countless recent authors you name. Their sour wine is easily found lacking by anyone who has tasted and who savors the old wine of those ancient authors.

Agrippa then formulates a general rule concerning this matter. In order to verify historical events, one must believe either the authority of those who were present or near by when the events happened, or at least the authority of those who lived at the time of the events or followed trustworthy sources:

De his quae ad historicam veritatem pertinent illis auctoribus absque repugnantia credendum est, qui narratorum temporibus, locis, gestis, personis, fuerunt praesentes, aut vicini, seu memores, vel historiam suam ex antiquioribus probata fide exceperunt. (*Defensio*, fol. D v^r)

Concerning the things that are related to historical truth one must trust, without any reservation, those authors who were present at the time, the place, the events and the persons involved in the things that are narrated, or who were close by or remember them, or who have drawn their knowledge of the historical facts from older writers of irreproachable authority.

He then continues with a brief account of the importance of historical sources in the early Church. In former times, he points out, clergymen also fulfilled the office of notaries recording public events, and their records were filed in libraries and archives. To illustrate this, Agrippa refers to a Biblical episode: after the Jewish people returned from the exile in Babylon, the controversy concerning the building of the temple was solved as a result of the utilization of the

official records of the Persians (Ezra 5–6). Therefore, those authors are the most trustworthy who had such an official function and either personally registered the events or copied them from a primary source.⁶⁶ This principle of the trustworthiness of the oldest source available, Agrippa continues, has been held valid throughout the ages, and for this reason the early popes ensured the official recording of church history. To exemplify this, Agrippa mentions that Pope Fabian (d. 250) appointed seven ‘collaterales’ (later to be called cardinals) who were each in charge of a notary whose duty it was to record the deeds of the martyrs. He also mentions that Popes Marcellus and Sylvester I saw to the recording of historical events.⁶⁷ Among those who recorded the history of the early Church, Eusebius ranks as the most distinguished, due to the excellence of his sources. This judgment, so Agrippa concludes, is not only confirmed by later Church historians, but also by writers of world histories who currently use Eusebius as a reliable source.⁶⁸ On the basis of these standards, Agrippa proceeds to refute the value of the modern theologians mentioned as authorities by Salin. He discerns three categories among these modern writers, each to be repudiated to a larger degree. First, there are those to whom their subject matter is foreign and remote, and who know nothing about the literature, customs and laws of the old times. Unless these authors cite the testimonies and the considerations of the ancient theologians faithfully, they cannot be fully relied on and have no authority. Next, Agrippa discerns those who do not follow the guidance of the ancient theologians, but who record solely their own private opinions or opinions that are dubious because they are not supported by trustworthy authors, or which spring from popular heresies. These authors should not be adopted unless they formulate generally accepted ideas. The third and least commendable group constitutes the scholastic theologians, whose work is characterized as follows:

Qui vero adeo indociles sunt, quod antiquioribus de antiquitate credere nolunt, sed contra antiquorum traditiones de rebus gestis ac historiis altercando, quae sibi videntur placentve utcunque pertinaciter defen-

⁶⁶ *Defensio*, fols. D v^r–D vi^r.

⁶⁷ Agrippa’s source for these historic details is probably the *Liber pontificalis* or a modern work containing the history of the popes, e.g. Ebendorfer’s *Chronica pontificum Romanorum* or Platina’s *Vitae pontificum*.

⁶⁸ *Defensio*, fols. D vi^r–v.

dunt, hii eadem facilitate contemnendi sunt qua contendunt. (*Defensio*, fols. D vi^v–D vii^r)

But those who are so intractable that they do not want to rely on what the ancient authors write about ancient things, and stubbornly defend as best they can whatever they feel or fancy, quarreling over historical events, in opposition to the traditional learning, these writers must be despised with the same readiness with which they argue.

Agrippa stresses that these writers are ignorant of ancient history and the classical languages, and he observes that in their Biblical commentaries, with their futile and petty *quaestiones*, even the genealogy of Christ is exposed to the mockery of the Jews.⁶⁹ Agrippa's discourse then turns into a ferocious tirade against scholasticism and dialectic.⁷⁰

These two passages display the two criteria used by Agrippa to define good and bad theologians, namely, concern for the hidden meaning of Scripture and closeness to the Revelation. These criteria can be made more tangible by means of three other passages, in which Agrippa provides lists of authors, and in a few cases, their works, which he considered particularly valuable. These passages are (1) the above-cited passage of the Pavia lecture, in which Agrippa explains the method of commenting the *Pimander* which he intends to follow in his course, (2) a passage in chapter five of *De triplici ratione cognoscendi Deum*, where, after a long invective against scholastic theology, Agrippa presents a catalog of authors who practised the true theology, which had begun with the apostles,⁷¹ and (3) in chapter 98 of *De incertitudine*, dealing with the various kinds of Biblical exegesis.⁷² In addition to these lists, two passages exist which, without being as detailed as the other passages, do contain some additional names, namely a passage in the *Defensio* against the *Conclusiones* of Salin,⁷³ and a passage in the *Apologia* against the attack of the Louvain theologians.⁷⁴ Among the authors whom Agrippa mentions in these texts figure both Latin and Greek authors, and not only ancient, but also

⁶⁹ *Defensio*, fols. D vi^v–D vii^r.

⁷⁰ *Defensio*, fols. D vii^r–E i^r.

⁷¹ *Collected Treatises*, fols. H 1^r–v.

⁷² *De incertitudine*, ed. 1531, fols. 145^v–147^r; *Opera*, pp. 286–290, the list of Biblical exegetes at fol. 146^v; pp. 288–289.

⁷³ *Defensio*, fol. I iij^r.

⁷⁴ *Apologia*, chapter 11, fols. D viii^v–E i^r.

some modern ones. Although the information provided in these texts is not very specific, it is nonetheless clear, if one establishes a list of all the authors mentioned in these texts, that Agrippa had a particular interest on the one hand in those authors (mainly Church Fathers) who have enquired into the profound meaning of Scripture or who have explained the basic principles of Christian belief on the basis of the Bible, and on the other hand in authors and writings that have a mystical inclination. The complete list of authors and works mentioned by Agrippa is as follows, in alphabetical order. The names are given in the form in which Agrippa gives them; wherever possible, the modern form of the name and the dates are added between square brackets:

- Aegidius [Aegidius Colonna Romanus, or Giles of Rome, c. 1247–1316]
- Algazel [al-Ghazali, 1058–1111; Agrippa cites from the *Metaphysica*]
- Albertus, cognomento Magnus [Albert the Great, d. 1280]
- Ambrosius [St. Ambrose, 4th century]
- Anselmus [St. Anselm of Canterbury, 1033–1109]
- Athanasius, Alexandrinus episcopus [Athanasius of Alexandria, 4th century; Agrippa mentions specially his works against the Arians]
- Augustinus [St. Augustine, 354–430]
- Basilius cognomento Magnus [St. Basil, 4th century]
- Beda [St. Bede the Venerable, c. 672–735]
- Bernardus [St. Bernard of Clairvaux, 1090–1153]
- Bonaventura [St. Bonaventure, c. 1217–1274]
- Cassianus [St. John Cassian, c. 360–c. 435]
- Ioannes cognomine Chrysostomus [St. John Chrysostom, c. 347–407; Agrippa mentions him primarily on account of his eloquence]
- Nicolaus de Cusa [Nicholas of Cusa (1401–1464); Agrippa mentions specially *De docta ignorantia*]
- Cyprianus [St. Cyprian, 3rd century]
- Cyrillus, Alexandrinus episcopus [St. Cyril of Alexandria, patriarch of Alexandria, d. 444; Agrippa mentions specially his commentary on John]
- Damascenus [St. John Damascene, c. 650–750]
- Didymus cognomine caecus [Didymus the Blind, 4th century; Agrippa mentions specially his *De processu spiritus sancti*, in the Latin translation by St. Jerome]
- Dionysius Areopagita [Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, fl. c. 500]

- Eusebius Caesariensis [Eusebius of Caesarea, fl. 4th century; Agrippa mentions specially his *Praeparatio in evangelicam veritatem*, or *praeparatio evangelica*]
- Gerson [Jean de Gerson, 1363–1429]
- Gregorius Nazianzenus [St. Gregory of Nazianzus, 4th century; Agrippa mentions him primarily on account of his eloquence]
- Gregorius [St. Gregory I, or St. Gregory the Great, c. 540–604]
- Henricus Gandavensis [Henry of Ghent, c. 1217–1293]
- Hieronymus [St. Jerome, c. 350–420]
- Hugo de Sancto Victore [Hugh of St. Victor, 1096–1141]
- Irenaeus [St. Irenaeus, 2nd century]
- Joannes Moscabensis [it is unclear who Agrippa means; he mentions specially his commentary on Proclus]
- Johannes Scotigena [John Scotus Erigena; 9th century, Agrippa mentions specially the ‘Tomi paraphraseos’ (i.e., probably, the translation of the works of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite), and a commentary on the ‘mystica theologia’ of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite]
- Lactantius [Lactantius, c. 250–c. 320]
- Leo [St. Leo I, or St. Leo the Great, 5th century]
- Marius Victorinus [Marius Victorinus, c. 275–c. 363; Agrippa mentions specially *Ad candidum Arrianum*]
- Maximus monachus [St. Maximus the Confessor, c. 580–662]
- Origenes [Origen, c. 185–254]
- Polycarpus [St. Polycarp, 2nd century]
- Robertus Linconiensis [Robert or Rupert, bishop of Lincoln, d. 1253. Agrippa mentions specially his commentary on the works of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite; he also wrote a *Summa theologiae*]⁷⁵
- Ruffinus [Rufinus, c. 345–410]
- Tertullianus [Tertullian; c. 150–c. 230]
- Theodotus [It is unclear whom Agrippa means; he mentions his *Clavis philosophorum*]
- Thomas [St. Thomas Aquinas, 1224–1274].

⁷⁵ See J. Trithemius, *De scriptoribus ecclesiasticis*, consulted in: Fabricius, *Bibliotheca ecclesiastica* (. . .), p. 99, no. cccxciii.

CHAPTER THREE

METHOD OF REASONING AND STYLE OF AGRIPPA'S THEOLOGICAL WRITINGS

1. *Basic features of Agrippa's method of reasoning*

From Agrippa's tirades against the method of reasoning used in scholastic theology, it is clear that he would never consider exploiting Aristotelian logic in his own theological writings. According to which pattern then have his own treatises been written? This topic may be briefly reviewed, since Agrippa applied one and the same method of reasoning to all the texts in which he formulated his views on matters related to religion and theology. These texts include his university lectures on Neoplatonic love and on the first dialogue of the *Corpus Hermeticum*, the *Dialogus de homine*, the *Liber* (or *Sermo*) *de triplici ratione cognoscendi Deum*, the *Sermones* or informal addresses to friends (*Sermo de vita monastica*, *Sermo de inventione reliquiarum Beati Antonii Heremitae*, and the *Dehortatio gentilis theologiae*) and finally the *Declamationes* (*De nobilitate et praecellentia foeminei sexus*, *De originali peccato*, *De sacramento matrimonii* and *De incertitudine*).¹ The essence of this method of reasoning is extremely simple. Agrippa's theology focuses on the exegesis of sacred texts and of the Bible in the first instance. In his academic lectures (as far as we can tell from what he says about them) and in each of his treatises, Agrippa formulates a thesis ('propositum,' 'opinio') which offers a certain explanation of the meaning (usually the profound meaning, occasionally the moral meaning) of a passage from the sacred text (the Bible). He then corroborates this thesis, following a pattern of inductive reasoning, by means of a large selection of authoritative texts ('auctor[itat]es'), which are, if applicable, arranged

¹ Compare Agrippa's own enumeration of his theological works in *Defensio*, where he mentions 'publicae theologiae lecturae, sacrarum literarum expositiones [i.e. the now lost commentary on the *Epistle to the Romans*], libri, varique sermones et declamationes' (*Defensio*, fol. B vi^r). Agrippa referred to the *Liber de triplici ratione cognoscendi Deum* as *Sermo de Dei notitia* in the dedicatory epistle to Guilielmus Paleologus (*Epistolae*, 1, 52, d.d. 1516, p. 642, and *Collected Treatises*, fol. F 2^r, where *seruio* should be corrected to *sermo*). For the character of the *Dehortatio gentilis theologiae* as an informal talk to friends, see above, chapter 1, pp. 24–25.

according to different perspectives ('rationes', 'argumenta'). Among the authoritative texts features most prominently of course the Bible itself, since Agrippa's theology starts from the idea that the Word of God is essentially self-explanatory. The Biblical testimonies are also supported by relevant references to the entire gamut of textual sources then in use in theological discourses; among these figures notably the *Corpus iuris canonici*, which sums up, so to speak, the whole structure and ideology of the Church of Rome. To Agrippa's mind, this method of arguing was the only permissible method in theological reasoning, that is, in the search for the true meaning of the Biblical message. Moreover, this is, according to Agrippa, the only method which is consistent with the requirement of humility and intellectual restraint which the theologian must display toward his lofty subject.

The samples from the Pavia lecture and from chapter 5 of *De triplici ratione cognoscendi Deum*, quoted above in the second section of chapter 2, illustrate sufficiently the method of reasoning which Agrippa uses throughout his theological writings. Since the principle of this method is immediately obvious to the reader of Agrippa's works, it will now suffice to pass in review, for the sake of clarity, one or two of Agrippa's own remarks concerning the definition of his method. As we shall see, such statements can be found in writings dating from every phase of his writing career. It will thus be clear that Agrippa continually and consistently put into practice his own method.

The first such statement occurs in the *Expostulatio*, the letter to the Franciscan Catilinet, written from London in 1510 and published in the *Collected Treatises* of 1529. In this letter Agrippa argues that in his public lectures on *De verbo mirifico*, delivered at the University of Dôle in 1509, he had not distorted the Scriptural text and confused it with the cabbala, as Catilinet had claimed, but had discussed various ways of interpreting the Bible used by a variety of (Jewish) scholars:

scripturas sacras nusquam contorqueo, sed iuxta diversorum doctorum diversas expositiones, diversimode in testimonium assumo. (*Collected Treatises*, fol. D 2^v)

Nowhere do I distort Holy Scripture, but I quote it as testimony in various ways, according to the various ways of explaining it by various scholars.

The second statement occurs in the Pavia lecture of 1515. After detailed criticism of the scholastic method and an account of Hermes Trismegistus's biography and of the content of the *Pimander* (that is,

the first dialogue of the *Corpus Hermeticum*), Agrippa points out that in his course he would clarify, by means of all kinds of textual authorities, the philosophical and theological thoughts in the *Pimander* requiring explanation and, wherever necessary, would account for the ratiocinative structure and strategy of persuasion which its author uses:

Quae omnia vobis, ut auctoris verba id expostulant, partim theologicæ, partim philosophicæ partim dialecticæ rhetoricæque more enucleabimus, enumerantes scripturas, auctoritates, sententias, opiniones, exempla et experientias ad rem ipsam pertinentes; sacrorum denique canonum civiliumque legum sanctiones dum dabitur occasio, haud impertinenter adducentes. (*Collected Orations*, fol. B viii^v; *Opera*, p. 1097; ed. Zambelli, p. 124)

I will explain to you in detail all these things (i.e., the content of the *Pimander*). As the words of the author (i.e., Hermes Trismegistus) require, I will do so partly by using theology, partly by using philosophy, and partly by using dialectic and rhetoric. In the course of my discussion, I shall cite Biblical texts, authorities, observations, opinions, examples, and empirical facts relating to the matter at hand, and finally, when the occasion allows, I shall adduce in a proper way the provisions of canon and civil law.

Next, let us turn our attention to the relevant remarks made in three of the Declamations, namely *De nobilitate et præcellentia foeminei sexus* (1509), *De originali peccato* (1518) and *De incertitudine* (1526). In the letter in which Agrippa dedicated *De nobilitate et præcellentia foeminei sexus* to Princess Margaret of Austria, he explicitly writes that his treatise is not an ordinary piece of epideictic oratory, but a serious work arguing the glory and respectability of the feminine sex by means of rational arguments, authorities, examples, and testimonies from both Scripture and legal sources:

Annuntiabo itaque gloriam mulieris, et honestatem eius non abscondam, [. . .] tum quia nullo adulandi assentandive studio hanc operam aggressus sum, ideoque non tam studium fuit rhetoricis figmentis officiosisque mendaciis verba in laudes ornare, quam rem ipsam ratione, auctoritate, exemplis, ipsisque sacrarum literarum, et utriusque iuris testimoniis monstrare. (*Collected Treatises*, fol. A 3^v; *Opera*, p. 503, Antonioli, p. 48)

I shall proclaim the glory of woman and I shall not hide her virtue, [I trust that I will be excused for treating this sublime subject in an all too

a mean style], because, furthermore, I have not undertaken this labor in order to adulate and flatter, and therefore, it has not been my attempt to adorn my words with praise through oratorical fabrications and ceremonious falsehoods, but rather to fully reveal the facts of the matter by means of reasoning, quoting from authorities, examples, and the very testimonies of Scripture and both kinds of laws.

In the introduction to the treatise itself, he returns to this point and indicates the theme and plan of his writing as follows:

Quae autem praeter animae divinam essentiam in homine reliqua sunt, in iis muliebris inclyta stirps durum virorum genus in infinitum paene excellit. Quod tum demum ratum firmumque erit, cum id ipsum—et quod institutum nostrum est—non adulterinis fucatisve sermonibus, neque enim logicis tendiculis quibus multi sophistae homines illaqueare solent, sed cum optimorum auctorum patrociniis rerumque gestarum veridicis historiis ac apertis rationibus, tum sacrarum literarum testimoniis et utriusque iuris sanctionibus ostensum est. (*Collected Treatises*, fols. A 4^{r-v}; *Opera*, p. 504; Antonioli, p. 49)

Aside from the soul, whose nature is divine, the distinguished female sex surpasses almost completely the crude male species with regard to those other things which make up the human kind. This thesis shall only then be settled and determined, when it is validated—and it is our purpose to do so—not with insincere or sophisticated talk, nor with the traps of logic which are usually set by many sophists, but under the protection of the best authors, by means of true historical narratives and through plain arguments on the one hand, and through testimony from the Bible and the provisions of both kinds of law on the other hand.

After discussing all the relevant material, Agrippa sums up his argumentation in the following manner:

Nunc tandem, ut me quam brevissime recolligam, ostendimus praeellentiam muliebris sexus a nomine, ab ordine, a loco, a materia, et quid dignitatis mulier supra virum sortita sit a Deo, deinde a religione, a natura, ab humanis legibus, iam varia auctoritate, ratione et exemplis promiscue demonstravimus. (*Collected Treatises*, fol. C 8^r; *Opera*, p. 535; Antonioli, p. 89)

To sum up my point as briefly as possible, we have proved the excellence of the feminine sex on the strength of the name, the order, the place and the matter. Furthermore, we have demonstrated the degree of dignity which women have been granted by God above that of men,

by means of a miscellany of authoritative statements, rational considerations and examples, drawn from the fields of religion, nature, and human institutions.

This statement is immediately followed by a final statement in which Agrippa testifies to his sincerity and his modesty, and invites his readers to evaluate his argumentation and if possible to provide additional arguments:

Tamen non tam multa diximus, quam plurima adhuc dicenda reliquerimus, quia non ambitione commotus, aut meae commendationis causa veni ad scribendum, sed officio et veritate, ne tanquam sacrilegus, tam devoto sexui debitas sibi laudes (ut talentum mihi creditum suffodiendo) impia quadam taciturnitate surripere videar si silerem. Quod si quis me curiosior a nobis praeteritum aliquod argumentum repererit, quod huic operi nostro adstruendum putet, ab illo me non argui sed adiuvari credam, quatenus bonam hanc operam nostram, suo ingenio doctrinaeque meliorem reddiderit. Ne ergo opus ipsum in nimis magnum volumen exeat, hic illius finis esto. (*Collected Treatises*, fols. C 8^{r-v}; *Opera*, p. 535; Antonioli, p. 89)

But I have left even more unsaid than I have in fact spoken in this regard, because I have not taken up this topic out of ambition or in order to seek applause, but out of a sense of duty and a desire for the truth, in order to avoid giving the impression, should I remain silent, that, as if I were sacrilegious, and were thus to undermine the talents that I have been endowed with [cp. Matthew 25, 14–30; Luke 19, 11–27], by means of a silence lacking in piety, I were to deprive such a steadfast sex of the praise it deserves. If then someone more inquisitive than I will find an argument that I have overlooked, and which he thinks should be added to our writing, I shall not feel that I have been exposed but rather that I have been assisted, insofar as he shall make my good work even better by virtue of his intelligence and learning. Therefore, I shall end here in order that my work not become too long.

In *De originali peccato* (1518), Agrippa discusses his interpretation of Original Sin in terms of the sexual act. This definition, or rather, this opinion, as Agrippa emphatically calls it (we shall explain the reason for this in chapter 5 below), is introduced by a powerful declaration, in which Agrippa reminds the reader of the large number of diverging opinions concerning original sin which have been advanced and defended throughout the history of Christian theology, stressing that he considers his own definition as a contribution to this debate. The

reason for this declaration is on the one hand the fact that Agrippa wanted to declare his firm allegiance to the Church of Rome (we shall also return to this point in chapter 5 below), and on the other hand the fact that he wished to invite the learned reader to follow his opinion, and to provide additional arguments in support of his thesis. Here too, then, Agrippa presents himself in a discreet way, suggesting that he is open to an honest debate over the matter at hand:

... si, ut enim homo sum immaturae aetatis, ingenii ac litteraturae minoris, in sensu meo non tantis scripturarum testimoniis abundem, ut res ipsa requirit, forsitan sequentur me doctiores quidam, quibus haec nostra opinio non displicebit. Ab his me non modicum adiuvari posse confido, quatenus validioribus rationibus ac argumentis suis opinionem nostram robustiorem effecerint. (*Collected Treatises*, fol. I 5^v; *Opera*, p. 554)

If, since I am a man of immature age and gifted with little intelligence and erudition, I do not offer as much Biblical testimony in support of my interpretation as the subject might call for, perhaps some more learned than I, who will not reject my view, will follow me. I trust that such persons can help me to a substantial degree, in so far as they will offer a stronger foundation for my opinion by means of better reasons and arguments.

De incertitudine (1526) is also a theological writing, constructed like the other theological dissertations. The main thesis of this declamation is demonstrated by the presentation of a seemingly exhaustive list of conflicting opinions among individual scholars and schools in every branch of science, and of examples from history which show that men, in their moral depravation resulting from the Fall, have mostly used the arts and sciences to do bad things. After the Louvain theologians had attacked *De incertitudine*, Agrippa explained in his self-defense the method of reasoning which he applied in *De incertitudine*, because he felt that his opponent had not properly understood the design of the declamation. We shall return to this dispute in some detail below in chapters 4 and 5; it will suffice for now to point out that Agrippa indicates the method of reasoning followed in this declamation in the same way as in the other theological treatises:

Cum igitur istud sit thema declamationis meae, quod ego multis admodum rationibus, exemplis et auctoritatibus persuadere aggressus sum, si qui sunt qui illud improbare volunt, ipsorum erit meas argumenta-

tiones primum destruere, non meum erit de novo causam dicere, nam dare instantiam non est solvere, sed obiecta oportet diluere. (*Apologia*, chapter 4, fol. C viii^r)

That is the theme of my declamation, which I have tried to make plausible by means of a very large number of reasons, examples, and authoritative statements. Now, if somebody wishes to reject it as untenable, it will be his task to refute my arguments, and not mine to restate my case. For indeed, to formulate allegations is not the same thing as to invalidate, but it is necessary to substantiate the accusations.

From such statements as these, it may be seen that Agrippa's theological treatises have a rather cerebral character. They are indeed, for the most part, as plain and unembellished in matters of literary refinement as the academic disputations which Agrippa hated so much. Once again, the passages from the Pavia lecture and from *De triplici ratione cognoscendi Deum*, quoted in chapter 2, constitute good examples of the kind of writing one can expect from him. With its lack of stylistic adornment, the Pavia lecture is perhaps somewhat remarkable, because this text constitutes the solemn inaugural address for a university course. The lack of stylistic elegance in the text written for such an occasion is all the more remarkable, since we know that Agrippa possessed completely the art of rhetoric and probably was a good public speaker. His (now lost) inaugural address at Dôle in praise of Margaret of Austria was vigorously praised by at least one member of the audience, who was reminded of Demosthenes when he heard Agrippa speak:

Interrogatus aliquando Demosthenes, quid potissimum esset in oratore? respondit, pronunciationem, iterum atque iterum interrogatus, idem respondit, neque aliquid amplius. Audivimus itaque die hesterna, atque revera experti sumus in oratione tua verissimum fuisse oraculum Demosthenis. Foelix es, Agrippa, qui copiosam illam atque inundantem dicendi fertilitatem ita intra limites sinceritatis illius orationis tuae conclusisti, cui neque aliquid addi neque demi possit, et, quod maximum artificium ipse censeo, ut ne unius verbi auditores meminerint, quod in illa verbosa copiositate secus est. (*Epistolae*, 1, 15, n.d. [1509], p. 614)

When Demosthenes was asked at some time, 'What is the most important thing an orator must have?' he answered, 'technique of delivery,' and when he was asked again and again, he gave the same answer, and nothing else. Well, yesterday we heard, yes we truly experienced through your oration that the solemn assertion of Demosthenes was

completely true. You are blessed, Agrippa, because you were able to enclose the copious, indeed lavish profusion of your language within the boundaries of your marvellous, honest speech, where nothing could be added and nothing deleted. Moreover, I frankly take this to be the most important proof of your skill, that the listeners do not remember one single word which was badly placed in that long flow of words.

Furthermore, Agrippa's funeral oration for Margaret of Austria, written and published in 1531, shows that he was capable of writing a full-fledged and long humanistic oration. (This oration is the only one of the ten orations included in the *Collected Orations* of which Agrippa had an edition printed in honor of the deceased, and this may in part account for the fact that in this speech Agrippa gave free rein to his literary talent).² Furthermore, the discourse on the praise of Neoplatonic love and the third surviving academic discourse, a speech on justice and law probably written for delivery at a degree granting ceremony,³ are fine examples of Agrippa's talent for presenting his ideas in cultivated language, even though they are much less ornate than the funeral oration.

If it is certain that Agrippa had fully mastered the rules of rhetoric, how can the lack of ingenious composition and literary refinement in the theological treatises be accounted for? It is no doubt because Agrippa simply felt that religion and theology were not proper subjects for rhetorically embellished writing. The quotation from the opening pages of *De nobilitate et praecellentia foeminei sexus* noted above clearly places the scholastic disputations ('logicis tendiculis') and rhetorically ornamented discourses ('adulterinis fucatisve sermonibus') together in opposition to the form of reasoning which Agrippa deemed proper for the theological theme which he intended to discuss. At the beginning of *De incertitudine*, Agrippa stated with even more emphasis that he felt rhetorical embellishment to be inadmissible for theological subjects, and therefore inappropriate for the declamation which he was about to present:

Hanc sententiam [i.e. the main thesis of *De incertitudine*] auspicabimur, non vulgaribus duntaxat argumentis et a superficie rerum sumptis, sed

² See above, chapter 1, p. 41, note 102.

³ 'Oratio pro quodam doctorando,' published as *Oratio III* in *Collected Orations*, fols. C iii-C viii; *Opera*, pp. 1102-1109. See on the content and the date of this speech above, chapter 1, p. 26.

rationibus firmissimis et ex intimis rerum visceribus eductis, non ulla [illa *Opera*] Demosthenis aut Chrysippi arguta [argumentosa *Opera*] eloquentia, quae mihi sacras literas profitenti opprobrio esset futura, tanquam adulationes amanti, si fucos dicendi sequar. Nam loqui proprie, non eloqui, et rei veritatem, non sermonis ornatum, sacrarum literarum professorem intendere decet. Non enim in lingua, sed in corde veritatis sedes est. (*De incertitudine*, chapter 1, ed. 1531, fols. 11^v-12^r; *Opera*, p. 2)

This view we shall undertake to argue, yet not with clichéd arguments drawn from a superficial consideration of the facts, but with very forceful reasons deduced from their essence, and not with the cunning eloquence of a Demosthenes or a Chrysippus. Such eloquence would turn out to be a cause of disgrace for me as an exponent of Holy Scripture, if I, like a man who fancies flattery, were to pursue false eloquence. For it is fitting for one who professes Holy Scripture to express himself in the real sense of the word, not to orate, and to aim at the truth of things, not at the embellishment of style. For the basis of truth is not in speech, but in the heart.

2. *Rhetorical strategies in Agrippa's declamations*

In spite of the fact that Agrippa emphatically rejected the use of rhetorical ornamentation in his theological writings, he did not show himself in his writings to be a completely unemotional and academic intellectual. To the contrary, as we have already seen, Agrippa was entirely committed to promoting among his lettered audience the thought that faith should be granted a more prominent place in their lives, and that they should accordingly live more in harmony with the spirit of the Gospel. Agrippa shared with the humanistic theologians this desire to reach the mind of the general educated reader. He revealed this humanistic attitude of commitment to the moral improvement of society for the first time in public when he defended Lefèvre d'Étaples's opinion concerning the triple marriage of Saint Anne against the attacks of the Dominicans of Metz.

In the fourth of the *Propositiones* summing up Lefèvre's *De tribus et una*, Agrippa concisely voiced the important humanist notion that theological studies should not be pursued solely for their own sake, but should be strongly concerned with translating academic knowledge into the practical advancement of the Christian cause in everyday life:

In dubiis et disputabilibus et in utranque partem probabilibus, si popularium curiositas informanda est, id illis praedicandum est, quod credere magis pium est, hoc est, quod vero similis est, quod ecclesiasticis probatis scripturis conformius est, quod plus consonum rationi, quod mores hominum plus aedificat in imitationem evangelicam. (*Propositiones*, fol. A vii^v)

When simple people must be informed about things concerning which doubt and questions exist, and for which it is possible to find arguments for and against, that viewpoint must be taught to them through preaching, which is most devout to believe, namely that viewpoint which is most like the truth, most in agreement with the approved authors of the Church, most in harmony with reason, and which best elevates them to live in harmony with the teachings of the Gospel.

In Agrippa's declamations we also find evidence of his commitment to moral theology. In *De originali peccato* (1518), which offers an almost exclusively allegorical interpretation of Genesis 1–3, Agrippa at one point offers a brief moral interpretation of the fall of the inner man. The shift which the theologian Agrippa makes here, from purely academic exegesis to concern for the moral welfare of his fellow men, is reflected in the style by a shift from the use of the dispassionate third person to the more definite and committed first person plural:

Neque enim licet rationi turbare fidem, sed subiecta debet esse fidei, nec fides debet rationi succumbere, sed firmiter sperare in Deo. Ideoque condemnavit Deus Adam, quia credidit mulieri, neque vero debemus disputare de divinis, sed firmiter credere et sperare. De his vero, quae creata sunt, licet nobis rationis ministerio philosophari, disputare, concludere, non autem fidem et spem in illis ponere. (*Collected Treatises*, fols. I 4^v–I 5^r; *Opera*, p. 553)

For it is not appropriate that the intellect throws faith into confusion, but it must be subjected to faith, and faith must not give way to the intellect, but must firmly place its hope in God. That is why God condemned Adam, because Adam trusted his wife, and we must not debate over divine matters, but firmly put our faith and hope in them. On the other hand, we are permitted to philosophize, dispute, and formulate deductions by means of our intellect concerning all created things, but we are not to place our faith and hope in them.

This moral lesson is, incidentally, the key message which Agrippa impresses on his contemporaries in his massive and, as we shall see shortly, passionate *De incertitudine*.

In *De sacramento matrimonii* (1526) the intellectual tone with which the Biblical precepts concerning marriage are explained, is twice mitigated by a direct appeal to the reader, addressed in the second person singular. In his discussion of the contemporary abuses of the institution of matrimony, Agrippa addresses a paragraph directly to the reader, in order to urge him to follow the Biblical rule rather than his own material interest:

Tu igitur quicumque vis uxorem ducere, sit amor in causa, non census. Uxorem eligas, non vestem, tibi nubat uxor, non dos. Hoc animo invocato omnipotenti Deo, qui solus veram dat uxorem, requisito etiam parentum consensu, exhibitaque illis debita oboedientia, remota omni avaritia, ambitione, invidia ac metu, matura in te ipso deliberatione, libero consensu, ferventi sed rationabili castoque amore, sic uxorem accipito, Dei manu tibi perpetuo commendatam, ad perpetuam societatem tuam, non ad servitutem, cui sapientia tua praesis cum omni gratia et reverentia. Illa tibi non subsit, sed adsit fide et consilio, sitque in domo tua non ut mancipium, sed domina domus, in familia tua non ut famula, sed mater familiae genitrixque eorum quos tu in ea generabis liberos, qui rebus tuis dominabuntur, nomenque tuum referent ad posterum. Sic namque non nisi optimam uxorem sortieris (non enim solet nisi malis maritis mala uxor contingere)⁴ similesque liberos. (ed. 1526, fols. B iii^v–B iiiii^r; *Collected Treatises*, fols. E 4^r–v; *Opera*, p. 546).

You who wish to marry a woman, whoever you are, let love be your reason, not wealth. It is a wife you must choose, not a garment; it is a wife who must marry you, not a dowry. In this spirit, you must pray to God almighty, who alone can give you a true wife, and you must also ask for the consent of your parents and the parents of your bride, show them your obedience, which is your duty to them, lay aside all avarice, personal aspiration, envy and fear, and after mature spiritual reflection you must take your wife in mutually free agreement, and with warm but reasonable and chaste love. She has not been entrusted to you for ever by God's hand as your servant, but as your permanent companion, to whom you must gracefully and with reverence give guidance with your wisdom. She for her part must not be subject to you, but must stand by you in good faith and with good counsel, and

⁴ Agrippa quotes a fine sentence from Erasmus's *Encomium matrimonii* (ASD I, 2, ed. J.-Cl. Margolin, p. 423, lines 11–12; see for the *Encomium matrimonii* chapter 5 below, pp. 156–158). Agrippa quotes the same sentence from Erasmus's work in *De incertitudine*, ch. 67, ed. 1531, fol. 96^v; *Opera*, p. 182. In the first part of this chapter, Agrippa praises the institution of marriage and refers to his discussion of it in *De sacramento matrimonii* (ed. 1531, fol. 95^v–97^r; *Opera*, pp. 180–183).

she must live in your home, not as a slave but as the mistress of the house. In your household she must not be a domestic, but the mother of the family and the source of your offspring who will preside over your property and pass on your name to posterity. For this is the way in which an excellent wife will be conferred upon you, as bad wives are only conferred upon bad husbands, and the children likewise.

The conclusion of this treatise is also cast in the form of an appeal to the reader. Here too, the second person singular is used in direct address:

Tu itaque quicumque si homo esse vis, si hominem exuere non vis, si prae ceteris humanitatis officio fungi vis, si legitimus Dei filius esse vis, si pius in patriam, in familiam, in rempublicam, si vis possidere terram et promereri coelum, legitimum matrimonii vinculum in eas necesse est, indissolubilem vitae consortem perpetuo diligas, genus hominum adaugeas et, tanquam Dei filius et imago, tibi similes filios procreas, et ad columnem reipublicae patriaeque specimen, ac Dei reverentiam qui eos tibi largitus est, prudenter et relligiose enutrias, educas, et gubernes. (ed. 1526, fols. B vi^v–B vii^r; *Collected Treatises*, fol. E 6^r; *Opera*, p. 549)

And so you, whoever you are, if you want to be a human being, if you do not want to lay aside your humanity, if you want to surpass your fellow men in the execution of your task as a human being, if you want to be a legitimate son of God, if you want to be dutiful to your nation, your family and the state, if you want to possess the earth and deserve heaven, you must take up a lawful marriage bond, choose an inseparable companion for the rest of life, increase the human race, and procreate children in your image, just as you yourself are the son and image of God, and you must raise, educate and guide them with wisdom and piety, so that they may be pillars of the state and models for the homeland, and bring honor to God who has granted them to you.

As an emotionally engaged text, *De incertitudine* (written in 1526; published in 1530) occupies a unique place among Agrippa's declamations. The writing displays a passion, occasionally even an excitement which his other declamations lack completely. This special characteristic is due in part to the frustration which Agrippa felt when he wrote it in September 1526, as he himself explains in the dedicatory letter of the 1530 edition of the treatise:

... ipsunque iacet ingenium fortunae meae indignatione deiectum, adeo ut ex ipsa indignatione ferme cum Troiana illa Hecuba versus sim in

canem, ac nullarum virium sim ad bene dicendum, nil amplius memini, nisi mordere, oblatrare, maledicere, conviciari, atque sic adfectus, scripsi his diebus volumen satis amplum, cui de incertitudine et vanitate scientiarum titulum feci . . .⁵

. . . and I am feeling dejected as a result of outrage over my destiny, so much so, that because of this outrage I almost have been turned into a dog, like Hecuba from Troy [cp. Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 13, 566 ff.], and have no force in me to speak well, but I know only how to bite, bark, speak evil and rail, and in this mood, I have recently written a rather large volume, which I have entitled *On the uncertainty and vanity of the arts*.

At this time, Agrippa's relationship with his employer Louise of Savoy had deteriorated as a result of his protest against Louise's order that he make astrological prognostications to foretell the outcome of the current political crisis in which Francis I found himself. Louise's disposition toward Agrippa did not improve when she found out that Agrippa had indeed written to a friend that he felt she was to blame for her superstition.⁶ Court theologians had also, in the presence of Louise, criticized a number of passages in Agrippa's *De sacramento matrimonii*, which had been published in early 1526. In several letters of this period, Agrippa expresses his anger with the way in which the French court treated him, with a striking tone of contempt for the court and of bitterness toward its members.⁷ This bitterness prompted the extremely censorious tone of *De incertitudine*. This appears from the dedicatory letter to Augustinus Furnarius, in which Agrippa declared that it was indignation with the way he was being treated that gave him cause for his metamorphosis into a barking and biting dog who had produced a cynical, that is, a dog-like, declamation ('cynica declamatio,' ed. 1531, fol. A ij^v; *Opera*, fols. *3^{r-v}).

⁵ *De incertitudine*, ed. 1531, fols. A ij^{r-v}; *Opera*, fols. *3^{r-v}. The dedicatory letter is not dated, but Agrippa made the decision to dedicate *De incertitudine* to Furnarius at the time of its completion in 1526. See *Epistolae*, 4, 44, d.d. 16 September 1526, p. 821; note that the words 'scripsi his diebus volumen satis amplum, cui de incertitudine et vanitate scientiarum titulum feci' occur verbatim in this letter.

⁶ See *Epistolae*, 4, 37, d.d. 28 August 1526, pp. 816–817.

⁷ See especially *Epistolae*, 4, 51, 54, and 75 d.d. 30 September, 10 October and 3 December 1526, pp. 828–829; 834–836; 859–860. In *Epistolae*, 4, 75 Agrippa succinctly summarizes his feelings about the French court by referring to it as 'Corinthus vel salacissimorum hircorum stabulum' [a Corinth or a stable of exceedingly lubricious he-goats].

The indication 'declamatio invectiva,' which occurs on the title page of the Cologne editions published in 1531 and after, and which is surely appropriate, naturally has the same function. The aversion to court life and the French royal court in particular is clearly expressed in those chapters of *De incertitudine* which deal with court life in general and with the different kinds of courtiers in particular (chapters 68–71), and in the chapter on nobility (chapter 80). More specifically, at the end of chapter 69, Agrippa concludes a historical survey showing that all courtiers are wicked men with the following remark, which constitutes the only reference to a contemporary situation in this chapter:

Tales hodie habet Gallorum rex Franciscus ad mala consilia nimium promptos, qui illum contra Caesarem in omnem perfidiam ac tyrannidem libenter impellerent, atque ii interim optimi habentur atque fideles. (*De incertitudine*, ed. 1531, fol. 99^v; *Opera*, p. 189)

Such counsellors has today the king of France, Francis, who are all too inclined to give bad advice, and who encourage him to oppose the Emperor with treachery and tyranny, and who nonetheless are considered to be excellent and faithful.

And in chapter 80, which mainly contains a brief synopsis of the origin of the various royal houses in modern society, concerning which Agrippa had written a (now lost) detailed survey,⁸ Agrippa affronts the French royal family by mentioning the violent ascent to power of Hugh Capet, and adds that he was popular with the population of Paris on account of his valor, although he was not of noble birth (*De incertitudine*, ed. 1531, fol. 116^v; *Opera*, p. 225). It is interesting to note here in passing that more than fifty years after Agrippa wrote *De incertitudine*, his derogatory remarks about the French monarchy were still felt to be insulting in France, and Louis Turquet de Mayerne, who authored the 1582 French translation of *De incertitudine*, omitted Agrippa's criticism of the French diplomatic policy of the 1520s and remarked in a marginal note to the passage on Capet that this story is not credible and has been corrupted by those who hate the French monarchy.⁹

⁸ He mentions this volume in chapter 80 of *De incertitudine*, ed. 1531, fol. 117^v; *Opera*, p. 226.

⁹ See Van der Poel, 'The French Translation of Agrippa von Nettesheim's *Declamatio de incertitudine et vanitate scientiarum et artium: Declamatio as Paradox.*'

Yet the special characteristic of *De incertitudine* lies in the fact that it voices in a very detailed and expressive way the central Neoplatonic notion of Agrippa's theology, namely the opposition between knowledge ('ratio') and faith ('fides'). To interpret the practical consequence of this basic tenet for the reader (which he had already expressed on earlier occasions, both in his correspondence, e.g., in one of his letters to Cantiuncula, and in his treatises, e.g., the passage quoted earlier from *De originali peccato*), Agrippa argues that the security which all men seek in their existence does not come from human things such as wealth, knowledge, or political power, but depends entirely on the integrity of the individual's life and actions. This implies for the Christian that, in the last resort, everything depends on the individual's faith in God. In order to emphasize the basic importance of religion for an audience which, to Agrippa's mind, was neglecting this very point, Agrippa presents his case in the striking, challenging form of a paradox. He introduces his paradox as follows in the first sentence of *De incertitudine*:

Vetus opinio est, et ferme omnium philosophantium concors et unanims sententia, qua arbitrantur scientiam quamlibet homini ipsi pro utriusque captu ac valore nonnihil divinitatis adferre, ita ut saepe ultra humanitatis limites in deorum beatorum choros eos referre possint; hinc varia illa et innumera scientiarum encomia prodierunt, quibus unusquisque eas artes atque disciplinas, in quibus iam diuturno exercitio ingenii sui vires exauit, non minus ornato, quam longo sermone nititur omnibus anteferre, et vel supra caelos ipsos extollere. Ego vero alius generis persuasus rationibus, nil perniciosius, nil pestilentius hominum vitae animarumque nostrarum saluti posse contingere arbitror, quam ipsas artes ipsasque scientias. Ideoque converso ordine agendum censeo, et scientias ipsas non tantis praeconiis extollendas, sed magna ex parte vituperandas esse, mea opinio est, [. . .]. (*De incertitudine*, ed. 1531, fol. 11^v; *Opera*, pp. 1–2; emphasis added)

It is an ancient belief, and almost a unanimous conviction among all philosophers, that rational knowledge in any field bestows on the man who possesses it some divinity in accordance with the faculties and range of both the man and the science in question, as a result of which it is often possible to place them beyond the bounds of humanity, among the choirs of the blissful gods. Hence they have produced those various and countless praises of the sciences, in which each one, by means of a discourse both elegant and lengthy, makes an effort to praise above all the other arts and sciences and even extol more than the heavens

that particular skill and science in which he has sharpened the vigor of his mind over a period of time. I, for my part, guided by arguments of a different nature, believe that nothing can become more pernicious or pestiferous for the lives of human beings and the salvation of our souls than precisely those very arts and sciences. Therefore, I feel that one must reason in a contrary sense, and it is my opinion that the sciences must not be praised in such grandiose terms, but must for the most part be censured.

In practical terms, Agrippa argues that the arts and sciences have no intrinsic value, but derive their good or bad aspects from the use which man makes of them, and which can be intended as beneficial or harmful. Throughout the declamation, as we have already observed, Agrippa shows that, in the theory of each art and science, the differences of opinion (and hence quarrels among scholars) outnumber the things about which agreement exists, thus showing that little certainty exists in them. He furthermore maintains that men commonly use their skills or knowledge to harm, not to benefit, their fellow men and society at large. This long argument is brought to a close, in the last chapter, by means of a powerful summons to the reader to listen to the spiritual call that comes from the infallible Gospel. This chapter, labelled as the 'Operis peroratio,' is cast in the form of a passionate apostrophe, in which the author beseeches the reader to forget worldly things and collect himself spiritually and turn toward God. The chapter is too long to cite here in full, but the first and the last sentences give an adequate impression of its general content and tone. The form of address, 'asini' (asses), in the first sentence is a reference to the previous chapter (102) of *De incertitudine*, entitled 'Ad encomium asini digressio.' In this chapter, Agrippa combines Old and New Testament as well as Hermetic sources to praise the ass as the animal which symbolizes, specially through its strength, patience and clemency, both the inspired ignorant and the true Christian.¹⁰ The influence of Old and New Testament images and wording is also manifest in the last chapter, as its first and last sentence clearly demonstrate:

¹⁰ Agrippa's *Praise of the Ass* ties in with an age-old tradition; see for that tradition the brief remarks on Giordano Bruno's dialogue *Idiota triumphans* in Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, pp. 296-298, and Spampanato, *Giordano Bruno e la letteratura dell'asino*.

Vos igitur nunc, o asini, qui iam cum vestris filiis subiugalibus, iussione Christi, per eius Apostolos verae sapientiae nuntios praelectoresque in sancto eius Evangelio soluti estis a caligine carnis et sanguinis, si divinam hanc et veram, non ligni scientiae boni et mali, sed ligni vitae sapientiam assequi cupitis, proiectis humanis scientiis, omnique carnis et sanguinis indagine atque discursu, qualescunque illae sint, sive in sermonum rationibus, sive in causarum perscrutationibus, sive in operum et effectuum meditationibus vagentur, iam non in scholis philosophorum et gymnasiis sophistarum, sed ingressi in vosmetipsos cognoscetis omnia. (ed. 1531, fols. 157^v–158^r; *Opera*, p. 311)

And therefore, asses that you are, who, together with your subjugated children, are liberated from the obscurity of flesh and blood by the command of Jesus through the intercession of the apostles, the messengers of the true wisdom and the ministers of His holy Gospel, if you desire to acquire that divine and true wisdom, not that of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, but that of the tree of life, you will gain complete knowledge only after you have abandoned human sciences and all examination and study of flesh and blood, no matter what form they take, whether it is the form of linguistic reasoning, the investigation of particular problems or the examination of matters of cause and effect, and only after you have entered into yourselves, not into the schools of the philosophers and the classrooms of the sophists.

Orate igitur ad Dominum Deum in fide, nihil haesitantes, ut veniat agnus de tribu Iuda, ac librum vobis aperiat signatum, qui agnus solus est sanctus et verus, qui solus habet clavem scientiae et discretionis, qui aperit, et nemo claudit, qui claudit, et nemo potest aperire. Hic est Iesus Christus, verbum et filius Dei patris et sapientia deificans, verus magister, factus homo sicut sumus nos, uti nos perficeret filios Dei, sicut est ipse, qui est benedictus in omnia saecula. (ed. 1531, fol. 159^r; *Opera*, p. 314)

Therefore, pray to Lord our God, in faith and without faltering, in order that the lamb of Judah's tribe, the only true and holy lamb, the only lamb that holds the key to knowledge and discernment, and which opens that which none can close and closes none can open, pray to God that this lamb may come and open for you the book that has been signed. This is Jesus Christ, the Word and Son of God the father, wisdom become God, the true teacher, who has been made a man like ourselves, in order that we may be transformed into perfect sons of God, like Himself, blessed throughout all eternity.

This apostrophe is addressed to the general reader, but it clearly contains an implicit denunciation of the professional theologians, whom Agrippa accused, as we have seen, of blurring faith and reason (because they used Aristotelian logic in their theology) and, more generally, of theologizing without the proper spiritual and ethical attitude. It is also quite possible that Agrippa was thinking in particular of the theologians at the court of Louise of Savoy, who had attacked his *De sacramento matrimonii* behind his back. We can thus understand why professional theologians trained in the scholastic system would consider *De incertitudine* as a challenge to their own integrity as theologians.

Agrippa uses the paradox in *De incertitudine* as a stylistic device, exaggerating his point for the sake of clarity, to argue as strongly as possible the moral and religious lesson he wishes to teach. For this to become clear, we must anticipate in part our discussion of the attack of the Louvain theologians against *De incertitudine* and Agrippa's corresponding defence. In the *Querela*, one of Agrippa's two defences, he clearly formulates the purpose of his use of the paradox:

Declamationis autem proprium est, saepe et plurimum in ficto argumento, aut falsitatis defensione, aut veri repugnantia, aut vitii laude, aut virtutis oppugnatione, ad ingeniorum exercitationem, ad excitationem studiorum laborare, non ad dissolvendum aut statuendum veritatem, sed citra pertinaciam proponere quamlibet disputandi materiam ad utilitatem legentium, sicut ait Apostolus: 'Omnia quae scripta sunt ad nostram utilitatem scripta sunt' [cp. Romans 15, 4], non dicit omnia quae scripta sunt vera sunt, siquidem non minimam partem eruditionis fabulae, apologi, declamationes, disputationes, problemata, opiniones, parabola, caeteraeque admodum proficuae nugae, quibus etiam ne sacrae quidem carent literae, citra veritatis regulam sibi vendicant. (*Querela*, fol. L vii^r)

It is characteristic of the declamation that it develops one's intellectual training in order to enhance learning, often and indeed mostly by writing themes on a fictitious topic, or by defending what is not true, or by contesting what is true, or by praising sin, or by opposing virtue. The purpose of this endeavor is not to destroy or to affirm the truth, but to present for discussion any kind of subject, without rigidity, in order to serve the reader, in accordance with the word of the Apostle: 'Everything that is written, is written to be useful for us.' But he does not say that everything that is written is the truth, because a considerable part of learning consists of fables, apologies, declamations, disputations, problems, opinions, parables and other extremely useful trifles that we

find even in the Bible, and which are legitimate regardless of the rules that apply to the expression of the truth.

But the Louvain theologians did not understand this definition of the declamation, since they could not grasp Agrippa's use of rhetorical strategies to emphasize and explain his message as clearly as possible. Consequently, they thought that it was the purpose of Agrippa's argument to reject the arts and sciences completely and unconditionally. Agrippa cleared up this misunderstanding in chapter 2 of the *Apologia*, where he discusses the fact that the Louvain censor had abbreviated the full title of the declamation, *De incertitudine et vanitate scientiarum et artium atque excellentia verbi Dei*, to *De vanitate scientiarum*.¹¹ This abbreviation, Agrippa argues, proves that the theologians misunderstood his declamation as an *absolute* denunciation of all arts and sciences. He emphasizes that his point was to argue the *relative* worthlessness of arts and sciences when compared to the word of God. In this context, he maintains that the second part of the title is essential for understanding the purport of the *Declamatio*:

Sed prius mihi hoc unum cum illis expostulandum est, quod declamationis meae titulum detruncarunt, inquietes: ex quodam libro de Vanitate scientiarum, omittentes alteram partem, atque excellentia verbi Dei, ubi indicatur scopus, et finis, et intentio totius declamationis, admonenturque lectores scientias omnes incertas et vanas esse, si conferantur ad verbum Dei, licet secundum se consideratae, certae sint et utiles. (*Apologia*, ch. 2, fol. C iij^v)

But first I must challenge them on account of the fact that they have mutilated the title of my declamation by stating: '[statements] from a book on the vanity of the sciences,' omitting the other part, namely 'and of the excellence of the Word of God,' which points to the purpose,

¹¹ It should be noted that the imperial privilege printed in the first edition of 1530 also refers to *De incertitudine* as *De vanitate scientiarum declamatio* (see the text of the privilege in *De occulta philosophia*, ed. Perrone Compagni, pp. 63–64). Several sixteenth century Latin editions omit the second part of the title, starting with the Cologne edition of 1531, printed by Eucharius Cervicornus, which bears the title *De incertitudine et vanitate scientiarum declamatio inactiva, qua universa illa sophorum gigantomachia plus quam Herculeae impugnatur audacia, doceturque nusquam certi quicquam, perpetui, et divini, nisi in solidis dei eloquiis atque eminentia verbi dei latere (...)* (see *Index Aureliensis*, no. 101.840; von Murr, 'Conspectus omnium Editionum Operum Henrici Cornelii Agrippae ab Nettesheym,' p. 64). Later versions of this title are shorter, as in the 1536 edition (s.l., but doubtless printed in Cologne): *De incertitudine et vanitate scientiarum declamatio inactiva, denuo ab auctore recognita et marginalibus Annotationibus aucta* (see *Index Aureliensis*, no. 101.862; von Murr, p. 69).

the goal and intention of the entire declamation, and which reminds the readers that all the sciences are uncertain and vain in comparison with the Word of God, although they are unfailing and useful on their own account.

Agrippa then points out that the title of *De incertitudine* is the sort of exaggerated statement which occurs in everyday language (e.g. when we say that human justice is non-existent, that is, in comparison with divine justice, or that angels are impure beings, that is, in comparison with God). He also compares his strategy of overstatement with the defense of extraordinary statements in theological literature, for instance Jerome's thesis that marriage is an evil, compared to virginity, or the statement from Thomas Aquinas' *Quodlibetical disputations*, that in the sacrament of the Eucharist, the body of Christ should not be symbolized by bread and wine, but by the flesh of animals, because the flesh of animals better represents the thing it symbolizes.¹² Agrippa then argues in some detail that, since it seems so excessively facile to interpret bold statements for the worse, it is of quintessential importance to take into account the intention of the author, and here he strongly advocates a more tolerant attitude among theologians:

In omnibus igitur quae scribuntur et dicuntur, quorsum spectet mens scribentis dicentisve considerandum est, quae si feratur ad nullum peruersitatis scopum, meretur simplex et recta auctoris intentio, poscitque publica utilitas, ut si qua sint errata, etiam vel pauca perniciosa admixta, condonentur auctoris eruditioni, aliisve meritis, nec protinus trahantur ad calumniam, sed ad rectum sensum melioribus interpretationibus accommodentur aut cautionis notula signentur. (*Apologia*, chapter 2, fol. C iiij^r)

Thus, in everything that is written or said, one must appraise what the mind of the writer or speaker has in view. If there is nothing wicked in view, then the straightforward and true intention of the author deserve, and public utility demands, if there are errors, even if there are some harmful things, that these be disregarded on account of the author's erudition and his other merits. They should not be immediately interpreted as slanderous, but they should be explained in a positive way or else marked by a small note of warning.

¹² Agrippa borrowed this example from Erasmus; see below, chapter 5, pp. 177–178, note 43.

In this passage Agrippa seems to adopt a rather modest position, and actually even to formulate an indirect apology for the form in which he had chosen to deliver his message to the public in *De incertitudine*. In fact, his point here is not to apologize for having been unacceptably immoderate, but to argue that it was his opponent who should be more reasonable and tolerant in judging his writing. Thus, in the following pages, he launches a vigorous counter-attack against his opponent, which begins with a small but illustrative list of authors whose doctrine is judged to be orthodox, but whose views are nonetheless in part generally accepted as dissident: Lactantius, Tertullian, Jerome, Augustine, Pope Innocent, Zosimus and Thomas Aquinas (fols. C iii^jr-v). Agrippa then enumerates a selection of statements from contemporary theologians which, for his part, he judges to be blasphemous. Among these figure a statement of the Cologne theologians to the effect that Aristotle is the precursor of Christ in natural philosophy, just as John the Baptist is in the field of grace;¹³ the statement from Hoogstraten's *De invocatione sanctorum* that it is heretical to have recourse to the Bible; the statement made in a sermon by some unnamed theologian that it is better to follow ecclesiastical custom ('consuetudo') than the authority of Scripture, and two statements from Hoogstraten's *Contra Lutheranos*, first that Christ is present during the sacrament of the Eucharist, but that He is not present in this or that particular host, and secondly that sins are remitted in general, but the sins of individual people are never remitted.¹⁴ In the remaining part of this chapter, Agrippa bursts into a violent tirade against the *magistri* of the Sorbonne and of the universities of Cologne and Louvain.¹⁵

In chapter 21 of the *Apologia*, Agrippa returns once more to his use of the rhetorical strategy of overstatement from *De incertitudine*. There, he responds to the censor's denunciation of the final sentence of chapter 64 (on pandering) of *De incertitudine*, in which Agrippa stated that the worldly authorities who tolerated prostitution should be condemned. One of the censor's arguments was that authorities who allow prostitution and thereby avoid a greater evil, should be supported. Agrippa retorts not only with several testimonies in support

¹³ *Apologia*, chapter 2, fol. C v^r. This example is also mentioned in *De incertitudine*, chapter 54 (on moral philosophy), ed. 1531, fol. 67^v; *Opera*, p. 121.

¹⁴ *Apologia*, chapter 2, fol. C v^r.

¹⁵ *Apologia*, chapter 2, fols. C v^r-C vii^r.

of his original viewpoint, but also with the remark that that viewpoint was not intended as a statement formulating a religious truth that he wished to maintain with obstinacy ('pertinacia;' here, and elsewhere in the *Apologia* and *Querela*, 'pertinacia' denotes the stubbornness of the heretic who, because of his hubris, perseveres with his error); rather, it was a dissuasive argument against vice, cast in the form of hyperbole. He stresses that this technique of warning against sin was also used by most Church Fathers, for instance, St. Jerome, St. Augustine and St. Bernard, and was abundantly used in contemporary sermons (*Apologia*, fol. F i^v). In this passage, it becomes clear once again that the technique of exaggeration is used to impress the reader and urge him to correct his morals.

Since *De incertitudine* is the largest and, in its form, the most compelling statement of Agrippa's key theological ideas, and since it received during Agrippa's lifetime the widest dissemination in print of all his writings, it is fair to say that it forms the climax of his public self-presentation as an opponent of the university theologians who practised theology as an Aristotelian science. If we recall the vigorous attacks against Agrippa's lectures on Reuchlin's *De verbo mirifico* in Dôle and against his defense, in Metz, of Lefèvre d'Étaples's view on the triple marriage of Saint Anne, it would appear that a negative reaction from the professional theologians to this new, extremely forceful and widely read public statement was surely inevitable. And indeed, the theologians of the Sorbonne formally condemned *De incertitudine* as a work favoring Lutheranism as soon as it was published in Paris in the first months of 1531. The theologians of Louvain also attacked *De incertitudine*, as a result of which Agrippa's position at the Imperial court became untenable. More generally, Agrippa's fate as a dissident in the Church and a paria in the world of learning was sealed, not only during the few years still remaining to him, but also for future centuries. Far from intimidating Agrippa, the opposition of the professional theologians against *De incertitudine* motivated him to present himself once more, as in the Pavia lecture and the *Liber de triplici ratione cognoscendi Deum*, in the strongest possible terms as an opponent of scholastic theology.

Agrippa turned the condemnation of *De incertitudine* into his own triumphant manifestation as a humanist. It is now appropriate to discuss in greater detail this apologia, as well as the attack of the Louvain theologians to which it was a response.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE BATTLE OF *DE INCERTITUDINE*: AGRIPPA IN THE WORLD OF HUMANISM

1. *Agrippa's reputation as a scholar at the time of the Publication of De incertitudine*

Around September of 1531 a priest named Andreas, who, in his longing for profound knowledge, was studying Agrippa's *De occulta philosophia*,¹ travelled from France to Germany in order to meet two of the greatest philosophers and theologians of his time, namely Erasmus and Agrippa:

Sic debui, et merito, servus et ignorantiae captivus, a Gallis ad Germanos transire, ut Erasmum et Agrippam, maxime lacteo fonte manantes, dominos suos et philosophos, et theologos doctoresque egregios et famosos per totam Europam et viderem et audirem loquentes et docentes. (*Epistolae*, 6, 32, d.d. 1531, pp. 987–988)

Thus it was necessary, and rightfully so, since I am a servant and a man caught in ignorance, that I travelled from France to Germany in order to meet in person and hear the conversations and lessons of Erasmus and Agrippa, men who truly flow from a spring as nourishing as milk, Germany's masters, philosophers and theologians, outstanding and famous scholars throughout Europe.

Andreas knew that Erasmus resided at Freiburg and so he went to him first. He was received very hospitably, but nevertheless, it seemed to him that his journey had been completely in vain. When he brought to the fore the questions he had about occult philosophy (that is, as he explained, white magic and cabbala), and about alchemy, it ap-

¹ Erasmus wrote to Agrippa about Andreas: '... libellum de Occulta philosophia perpetuum habet iūneris comitem' [He has your book On occult philosophy as a steadfast travel companion] (*Epistolae*, 6, 31, d.d. 19 September 1531, p. 987). Andreas was in possession either of a manuscript of *De occulta philosophia* or of a copy of the edition of book 1, which had appeared earlier that year in Paris, Antwerp and Cologne.

peared that Erasmus was not able to help him. Indeed, Erasmus disapproved of magic and cabbala, Andreas records in the letter in which he recounted his visit to the Dutch humanist, and, while more positively disposed toward alchemy, Erasmus admitted that he found it so difficult that he was unable to say anything sensible about it. Andreas's disappointment over Erasmus's reaction is clearly expressed between the lines of his letter. He finally asked Erasmus to write at least a letter of recommendation for him in order to facilitate his introduction to Agrippa. Erasmus obligingly agreed, and wrote a short note which constitutes the first letter of the brief correspondence between the two scholars.² It is a friendly note, in which Erasmus, among other things, alludes with a touch of irony to the fact that he was unable to help Andreas.

It was still to be a while before Andreas, with Erasmus's letter of recommendation in his pocket, actually met Agrippa, because Agrippa, who was at that time still connected with the Imperial court of the Low Countries, was temporarily away as a member of the entourage of the Emperor. Andreas travelled to Strasbourg, thence to Speyer and Cologne, and finally met Agrippa at the end of October in Brussels.³ Agrippa later told Erasmus that Andreas spent some days with him. Although no further details are known, it is likely that Andreas learnt much from his admired master. As his correspondence shows, Agrippa was always generous with his time for friends and he constantly worked to promote the study of magic, even in such times of deprivation and troubles with his employer as he was experiencing then. In addition, Agrippa was precisely at this time preparing for publication the final and complete version of *De occulta philosophia*, which appeared in 1533 at Cologne, after the local inquisitor had tried in vain to have its publication prevented by the city authorities.

² The correspondence between Agrippa and Erasmus comprises 9 letters written between 17 September 1531 and 21 April 1533; all these letters also occur in Allen: *Epistolae*, 6, 31, p. 987 and Allen, no. 2544; *Epistolae*, 6, 36, p. 994 and Allen, no. 2589; *Epistolae*, 7, 6, p. 999 and Allen, no. 2626; *Epistolae*, 7, 11, p. 1008 and Allen, no. 2692; *Epistolae*, 7, 17, pp. 1015–1016 and Allen, no. 2737; *Epistolae*, 7, 18, p. 1016 and Allen, no. 2739; *Epistolae*, 7, 19, pp. 1016–1017 and Allen, no. 2748; *Epistolae*, 7, 38, pp. 1064–1065 and Allen, no. 2790; *Epistolae*, 7, 40, p. 1066 and Allen, no. 2796.

³ See Agrippa's first letter to Erasmus, *Epistolae*, 6, 36, d.d. 20 December 1531, p. 994; Allen, no. 2589, p. 409.

2. *The publication of De incertitudine and its aftermath*

In the letter of recommendation for the priest Andreas, Erasmus also mentions *De incertitudine*, Agrippa's then recently published new writing. He writes that everybody was talking about Agrippa and his new book, and several scholars had already asked Erasmus's opinion about it. Most readers agreed that Agrippa expressed his views very frankly, but not everyone agreed with him:

In eo consentiunt, illic esse libertatis affatim, de caeteris variant sententiae. (*Epistolae*, 6, 31, d.d. 19 September 1531, p. 987; Allen, no. 2544, p. 352)

They agree on the fact that there is plenty of candour there, but otherwise the opinions are divided.

Erasmus had not yet seen the book, but he promised Agrippa that he would read it as soon as possible. And indeed, during the first months of 1533, Erasmus had his servant read the book aloud to him during his resting periods after dinner. He informs Agrippa very succinctly of his judgment in a short note, which was to be his last letter to Agrippa:

Placuit δεινῶσις et copia, nec video quor tantopere indignentur monachi. Ut vituperas malos, ita laudas bonos, sed illi tantum amant laudari. (*Epistolae*, 7, 40, d.d. 21 April 1533, p. 1066; Allen, no. 2796, p. 203)

I liked the emotional force of your language [see for the term *deinosis* Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria*, 6, 2, 24] and the richness of your material, and I do not understand why the monks are so offended. As you censure the bad ones, so you praise the good ones, but they only like to be praised.

Erasmus did not exaggerate the celebrity of *De incertitudine*. Written in 1526, the work was published with an Imperial privilege at Antwerp in September 1530. A year later, at the time when Erasmus was writing to Agrippa, it had been published in various editions at Antwerp, Paris and Cologne.⁴ Copies of *De incertitudine* were also dis-

⁴ First edition (with many misprints) at Antwerp in 1530 (see about the misprints *Epistolae*, 6, 8, d.d. December 1530, p. 946. There is a list of *errata* in the edition itself, fols. t 4^r-t 5^v. See for this edition also von Murr, 'Conspectus omnium Editionum Operum Henrici Cornelii Agrippae ab Nettesheim', pp. 58-64). A corrected edition was published very soon afterwards. The following editions were printed in 1531:

tributed in England, as it appears from a letter of Agrippa's friend Eustache Chapuy, the Imperial ambassador to the English court, who wrote to Agrippa from London that *De incertitudine* was being read there with approval.⁵ The fame of *De incertitudine* was certainly furthered by a circumstance which Erasmus did not mention in his letter to Agrippa (but which we can assume he knew about), namely the fact that *De incertitudine* had been condemned by the Sorbonne immediately after its publication at Paris in February 1531, as a writing favouring Lutheranism. On March 2, 1531, the Paris theologians included *De incertitudine* in the *Index* of books prohibited to the faithful. To motivate both the charge that it favored Lutheranism ('Lutheranae doctrinae plurimum favet') and the order that it be publicly burned ('publice exurendus'), they observed that *De incertitudine* contains statements opposing current usages in the Church ('multa habens contra cultum imaginum, templorum, festorum, et caeremoniarum ecclesiae') and that it is irreverent toward the approved Christian authors ('in scriptores sacri canonis blasphemus').⁶ The censured passages were

(1) an edition from January 1531, without place of publication and printer's name (see Prost, vol. 2, Appendice, note 34, p. 528, no. 7), (2) an Antwerp edition without printer's name (Apud Florentissimam Antverpiam), printed in January or February 1531 (see Nijhoff-Kronenberg I, no. 50), (3) another issue of the Antwerp edition, with the address of the Parisian printer J. Petrus, dated February 1531 (see Nijhoff-Kronenberg II, no. 2252), (4) a Paris edition which mentions the address of the printer, J. Petrus, on the title page, dated February 1531 (see Prost, vol. 2, Appendice, note 34, p. 528, no. 8; von Murr, p. 65), (5) a Cologne edition printed in January 1531 by E. Cervicornus (see Prost, vol. 2, Appendice, note 34, pp. 527–528, no. 6; von Murr, p. 64), (6) a Cologne edition printed by Melchior Novesianus (see Prost, vol. 2, Appendice, note 34, pp. 529, no. 11; von Murr, p. 67). See for the 1531 editions also Prost, vol. 2, Appendice, note 29, pp. 507–509. All references are to the Antwerp 1531 edition without printer's name, abbreviated as ed. 1531. Von Murr, pp. 58–70 and Clément, *Bibliothèque curieuse historique et critique*, vol. 1, pp. 81–86 provide useful enumerations of the unexpurgated editions of *De incertitudine* through around 1540.

⁵ *Epistolae*, 6, 19, d.d. 26 June 1531, pp. 959–961. Chapuy also says that *De occulta philosophia*, the first book of which had been published in 1530, was read with approval by the English public.

⁶ Duplessis d'Argentré, *Collectio judiciorum de novis erroribus*, vol. 2, p. 85. The full text is cited in von Murr, pp. 66–67, Prost, vol. 2, Appendice, note 10, pp. 464–465, and in Appendix 1 below. *De incertitudine* appeared not only on the Sorbonne *Index* of 1531, but also on that of 1544; see de Bujanda et al., eds., *Index des livres interdits*, vol. 1, pp. 88; 124. See also the condemnation recorded in the Archives Départementales du Nord, Lille, reg. B 2357, fol. 220, 11 September 1530: '(De *incertitudine*) l'on disoit contenir plusieurs choses déronçans [sic] a l'estat de l'Eglise et aussi aucuns points sentant hérésie' (quoted by Perrone Compagni, ed., *De occulta philosophia*, introduction, p. 8, note 24). See for the active pursuit of heresy and heretics by the Sorbonne Farge, *Orthodoxy and Reform in Early Reformation France*,

quoted in full by the Sorbonne; they stem from the chapters 57 (on statues), 58 (on temples and churches), 59 (on holy days), 60 (on ceremonies), and chapter 99 (on the writers on the Old and the New Testament).⁷ In Cologne, the rumor went that the authorities (more specifically, a certain Hostratus), were preparing a prohibition against the selling and reading of the declamation.⁸ It is thus plain that *De incertitudine* was the most controversial among Agrippa's published writings to date.

What Erasmus almost certainly did not know in September 1531 was that immediately after the publication of *De incertitudine* in September 1530, certain monks in the Low Countries had begun to denounce Agrippa and accuse him of all sorts of impieties in sermons to the general public. Moreover, certain clergymen residing at the Imperial court had started a secret campaign to discredit Agrippa in bringing *De incertitudine* to the attention of Margaret of Austria, Agrippa's employer, immediately after its first publication in Antwerp.⁹ They managed to convince her to send the work for inspection of its orthodoxy to the Faculty of Theology at Louvain. These same clergymen sent the work to the Emperor's brother Ferdinand, who was angered by its content and sent a letter about it to the Emperor.¹⁰ The Louvain theologians produced a formal document, entitled *Articuli*, in which they condemned certain passages of *De incertitudine*.¹¹ When Agrippa learned the content of the *Articuli*, he immediately wrote a self-defense. Before we analyse in detail the *Articuli* and Agrippa's response to them, let us briefly consider the edition in which the texts of this polemic are published.

pp. 160–219. Although the pursuit of heresy was a traditional activity of the Sorbonne, Farge (p. 161) stresses that from the 1520's onward, the Faculty was more careful to disseminate its specific pronouncements about orthodoxy and heterodoxy.

⁷ Duplessis d'Argentré, vol. 2, pp. 88–89. The passages are quoted in full in Appendix 1 below.

⁸ *Epistolae*, 6, 30, d.d. 1531, p. 986. Morley, vol. 2, p. 288 suggests that the letter was written by Agrippa's Cologne publisher. 'Hostratus' is not the well-known theologian Jacob Hochstraten, who died in 1527.

⁹ Agrippa describes these two lines of attack against his work in the dedicatory epistle of the *Apologia*, fol. A v^r.

¹⁰ *Epistolae*, 6, 15, d.d. 19 January 1531, p. 955.

¹¹ '*Articuli*' was the term commonly used for a list of errors, which, in the course of an academic trial, was drawn up from the work of a theologian whose work had fallen under the suspicion of heresy; see Thijssen, 'Academic Heresy and Intellectual Freedom at the University of Paris, 1200–1378,' p. 222.

3. *The edition containing the Apologia and Querela*

The edition containing Agrippa's self-defense was published in 1533. As the following observations show, the volume which Agrippa made public contains not only an extremely vigorous justification of *De incertitudine*, but also an eloquent defense of humanistic theology or, to use the term which Agrippa normally used, of *bonae literae*.

The self-defense constitutes two separate texts, namely the *Apologia* and the *Querela*. The *Apologia* (fols. C i^r–K i^r) is a tract directed to the members of the *Parlement* of Malines, in which Agrippa refutes point by point all the objections raised by the theologians, and for his part accuses them of incompetence and maliciousness because they had misunderstood or deliberately distorted *De incertitudine*. The much briefer *Querela* (fols. K ij^r–M vii^v) is a letter addressed to Agrippa's personal friend Eustache Chapuy, the Imperial ambassador in England, in which Agrippa repeats, without entering into the details of the actual allegations, that the theologians had misunderstood the main point of his declamation. Furthermore, he accuses the Emperor, who had acted as judge by commanding Agrippa to rescind the incriminated passages, of getting involved in what should have remained a dispute between theologians. More generally, Agrippa criticizes university theologians of making pronouncements on worldly affairs, thus unlawfully appropriating the responsibility of the pope and showing, by the content of their judgments, their incompetence and moral corruption. To substantiate this last point, he refers to the judgments formulated by university theologians in the divorce case of Henry VIII, concerning which emotions were running high then.¹² The final section

¹² In chapter 63 of *De incertitudine*, on prostitution, Agrippa disapprovingly alluded to Henry's divorce from Catherine of Aragon and second marriage to Anne Boleyn: 'Et hodie adhuc nescio cui regi persuasum audio, ut liceat sibi iam plus viginti annorum uxorem dimittere, et nubere pellici' [Even today, I am told, there is a certain king who is convinced that he can repudiate his wife to whom he has been married more than twenty years, and marry his mistress] (ed. 1531, fol. 84^v; *Opera*, p. 157). Chapuy recognized the reference, and asked Agrippa in June 1531 to compose a treatise against Henry's divorce and those who supported it, among whom were the Sorbonne theologians (see for the role of the Sorbonne theologians Farge, *Orthodoxy and Reform in Early Reformation France*, pp. 135–143). Agrippa declined, explaining that the moment was not favorable, since such a writing would only aggravate the trouble with theologians and worldly rulers he was already experiencing; he promised, however, to comply with Chapuy's wish if he received permission to do so from the Emperor and the new governor of the Low Countries, Mary of Hungary. See *Epistolae*, 6, 19–20, d.d. 26 June–21 August 1531, pp. 959–963; translation of these letters in Orsier, *Henri Cornélis Agrippa*, pp. 103–108.

of the *Querela* contains a complaint about all the attacks that the theologians had undertaken in recent years against the *bonae literae* and their advocates, such as Pico, Reuchlin, Lefèvre d'Etaples and Erasmus, and an invective against worldly rulers.

In addition to the two main texts (of which the *Apologia* is the longer and more important) and the *Articuli* of the Louvain theologians (or *theologistae*, as Agrippa referred to them contemptuously throughout the apologies), the 1533 edition contains various introductory materials intended to enhance as much as possible its appeal to humanist readers. That Agrippa clearly intended the two apologies to serve as an eye-catching denunciation of the conservative theologians who opposed humanism, is clear from the announcement of the completion of the two writings on February 6, 1532:¹³

Respondi Lovaniensibus calumniatoribus modeste quidem, sed non sine sale et aceto etiam atque sinapi, procul omni oleo. Edam in publicum, quamprimum licebit, forte non absque nova tragoedia, ut solet nova veritas novum gignere odium; nec deerunt, quibus placitura erit haec tragoedia. (*Epistolae*, 7, 3, d.d. 6 February, 1532, p. 998)

I have answered the Louvain calumniators modestly, yet not without salt and vinegar, and also mustard, yet without any touch of sweet oil. I shall publish it as soon as possible, perhaps not without some new calamity, since a new truth usually brings forth new hate. And there will be some who will enjoy this new calamity.

In fact however, the publication of the volume was considerably delayed, since Cratander, the Basel publisher whom Agrippa had entrusted with the publication in the second half of 1532, shrunk from publishing the two works at the last moment.¹⁴ The volume finally appeared in 1533 without a printer's mark, possibly in Cologne.

The volume opens with the text of an epigram in 13 elegiac distichs against *De incertitudine* written by the Louvain lawyer Busconius,

¹³ Consider also the fact that Agrippa wrote especially to Erasmus and Melancthon to draw the two humanists' attention to his conflict with the Louvain theologians (*Epistolae* 7, 17, d.d. 13 November 1532, pp. 1015–1016 (= Allen, no. 2737); *Epistolae*, 7, 13, d.d. 17 September 1532, p. 1012). This is the only letter Agrippa wrote to Melancthon. On July 17, 1532, a correspondent writing from Regensburg requests for two copies of the *Apologia* and *Querela* and remarks that everybody is eager to read the two writings (*Epistolae*, 7, 10, p. 1005).

¹⁴ These data appear from *Epistolae*, 7, 14, d.d. 13 November 1532, pp. 1012–1014; 7, 16, d.d. 13 November 1532, pp. 1014–1015; 7, 38, d.d. 10 April 1533, p. 1064 (= Allen, no. 2790). See Prost, vol. 2, Appendice, note 31, pp. 515–516.

a notoriously bad poet who had some unclear relation with the Louvain theologians,¹⁵ accompanied in the margin by Agrippa's derogatory remarks on the poor quality of the poem, two brief epigrams by Agrippa's friend and protector Aurelius ab Aquapendente, one in 4 elegiac distichs against the poetaster Busconius and one in 5 elegiac distichs against the Louvain theologians, and finally one epigram in 6 hexameters by Agrippa addressed to Emperor Charles V, in which Agrippa asks the Emperor to lend a favorable ear to his self-defense.¹⁶ These epigrams are followed by Agrippa's dedicatory epistle to Cardinal Lorenzo Campeggi, the papal legate.¹⁷

In this letter, probably completed around the middle of 1533, Agrippa mentions some benefits he had received from Campeggi, and he also reveals that he composed his entire self-defense against the Louvain attack in the residence of Campeggi's steward Bernardus Paltrinerius, between mid-December 1531, when he received a copy of the Louvain accusations, and February 1532. Contemporary

¹⁵ Busconius's epigram was sent to the Chairman of the *Parlement* of Malines, Nicolas Everhardi, on 29 October 1529. See on Busconius's ill repute as a poet de Vocht, *History of the Foundation and the Rise of the Collegium Trilingue Lovaniense*, vol. 2, pp. 208–209 and Allen, no 2851, p. 279, where Erasmus records that Goclenius used to call Busconius a 'metrarius.' Janus Secundus wrote an epigram to ridicule Busconius's epigram against *De incertitudine*, see Dekker, *Janus Secundus (1511–1536)*, p. 86. It is not known how Agrippa gained possession of the poem. In the *Apologia* Agrippa, commenting on the poor language, the muddled structure and inadequate argumentation of the *Articuli*, built on Busconius's bad reputation by suggesting in jest that the *Articuli* might have been written by the despised Louvain poetaster (*Apologia*, chapter 1, fol. C i^r). See also the conclusion of the *Apologia*: 'Ex his tandem mihi plane persuadeo librum declamationis meae per Lovanienses theologos non fuisse lectum, sed laborem illum aliis quibusdam fuisse distributum, in quorum fidem forte theologi aliqui subscripserunt notatis' [On the basis of these considerations I am quite convinced that my declamation has not been read by the Louvain theologians, but that this task has been given to some other men; and perhaps some theologians, trusting those men, subscribed their notes] (fol. I vi^r).

¹⁶ Agrippa wrote several more epigrams, published in the *Collected Orations* (fols. I v^r–I vi^r; *Opera*, pp. 1181–1182). This collection begins with two epigrams probably written on the occasion of the coronation of Charles V at Bologna, namely a eulogy of Charles V in nine distichs and a praise of Bologna in eighteen hexameters. This epigram is followed by one epigram on a portrait ('persona') of the emperor (ten hexameters), one epigram on a sculpture representing Charles V seated on the back of a horse (two distichs), one epigram on the death of a certain Mercurmus, a deceased former counsellor of the Emperor (three distichs), and two epigrams on an emblem of the Lord Rosebaldius (each comprising two distichs). These epigrams are accompanied by twelve, mostly brief, poems by Agrippa's friends Hilarius Bertulphus and Aurelius ab Aquapendente, and two anonymous poems (fols. I vi^r–K iii^j; *Opera*, pp. 1182–1193). All these poems deal with Agrippa and his household.

¹⁷ *Apologia*, fols. A iii^j–A vi^r; also printed as *Epistolae*, 7, 12, n.d., pp. 1008–1011.

readers, learning of Campeggi's kindness to Agrippa, may have also remembered Erasmus's dedicatory letter to Campeggi of his *Paraphrasis ad Ephesios* (early 1519 or 1520), in which Erasmus included a praise of the *bonae literae* (Allen, no. 1062). In addition, Agrippa briefly mentions in the dedicatory letter the facts which gave rise to the publication of his self-defense. He first observes that, while he had anticipated negative reactions to his declamation, he had not expected his opponents to attack him maliciously behind his back, but rather to challenge him openly, in a disputation or in a declamation presenting the *altera pars* of his own declamation:

... arbitrabar illos, eruditorum et proborum virorum more, aut diversam partem declamatorios, et adversus mea scripturos, aut disputationem publicam indicturos fuisse, . . . (*Apologia*, fol. A v^r; *Epistolae*, 7, 12, p. 1010)

I had thought that they (i.e. the opponents from Louvain), in accordance with the custom of learned and sincere men, would have declaimed the other side and written something against what I have written, or would have officially announced a public disputation.

He then excuses the bitter tone and the censorious character of his self-defense by suggesting that its style is intended to match the aggressiveness of the theologians.¹⁸ Secondly, Agrippa observes, thus criticizing indirectly the *Parlement* of Malines, that he had handed the text of the self-defense to the President of the *Parlement* a year and half ago (that is, around the time of its completion at the beginning of 1532); it was because he had not heard any official reaction from the *Parlement* since that time, that he had finally decided to publish his defense with slight modifications, in order to defend his good name.¹⁹ Finally, Agrippa denounces the behavior of the Emperor for having lent his ear to the false accusations of the theologians, thus mentioning briefly the argument which he developed more fully in the *Querela*.

¹⁸ He repeats this thought in the conclusion of the *Apologia*, where he stresses that the acrimonious tone of certain passages in the *Apologia* does not really belong in a theological writing, but was chosen only to match the attitude of the Louvain theologians (chapter 43, fols. I vi^v–Ivii^v).

¹⁹ Agrippa here cleverly uses the unforeseen delay of publication to his own advantage. In *Epistolae*, 7, 14, d.d. 13 November 1532, p. 1013, he had already mentioned the dedicatory epistle to Campeggi, so this part of the epistle must have been inserted shortly before the publication of the two writings at long last materialized.

The dedicatory letter is followed by an introduction to the *Apologia* and *Querela*, to which we shall return, and a brief address to the members of the *Parlement* of Malines, which serves as an introduction to the *Articuli* of the Louvain theologians. The *Articuli*, covering eleven pages (fols. B iij^r–B viii^r), are accompanied by facing notes. In these notes, Agrippa ridicules the *Articuli* by means of brief notes, in which he observes that the objections of the theologians are futile and written in poor Latin. We shall return to these remarks in section seven below, when we analyze the content of the *Apologia*. For the moment, it suffices to mention two examples of Agrippa's criticism of the censors' Latinity, to illustrate once more how Agrippa intended the 1533 edition to function as a humanistic denunciation of the scholastic theologians. Thus, Agrippa brands the form 'dampnare' as 'fratralis orthographia' (B iij^v), ridiculing it as 'fratrica elegantia' (B vii^v), and he also exposes the theologians' lack of Greek:

'Ydolatrie' per ypsilon, quia graecum est vocabulum, tam sciunt etiam graece magistri nostri. (*Apologia*, fol. B v^v)

'Ydolatrie' with upsilon [instead of the diphthong epsilon iota] because it is a Greek word; that shows us how well our *magistri* know even Greek.

Agrippa made a similar remark on the inelegance and defectiveness of his opponent's language in the case of the triple marriage of Saint Anne.²⁰

On the whole, it is clear from the introductory materials and from

²⁰ The *Defensio* begins as follows: 'Praeteribo infantissimam sermonis tui barbariem, qua omnes istae conclusiones tuae undique scatent. Praeteribo ortographiae tuae innumera vitia. Praeteribo ridiculum exordium, quo in ipso portu mox impingis, et omne quod ad Latinae linguae inscitiam, sordidamque structuram attinet, grammaticorum certamini relinquam. Neque vero de Latina elegantia certandum est cum barbaro, quin potius remittendus est dicendi stilus, tecum disceptaturo' [I shall pass over the utterly silly crudeness of your language, which appears everywhere in all your *conclusiones*, I shall pass over your countless spelling mistakes, I shall pass over your ridiculous introduction, in which you run aground before leaving harbour. Everything pertaining to your lack of knowledge of Latin and to the ugliness of your style I shall leave for the grammarians to fight over. For one must not fight with a barbarian over Latin elegance, and when one is about to discuss with you, one must rather abandon good style altogether] (*Defensio*, fol. B v^v). The *Conclusiones* of Agrippa's opponent start with the ungrammatical sentence: 'Cum a (ut estimamus) non theologo theologice propositae sint conclusiones quibus responderi expostulat iuxta exiguitates nostras aliquantulum daturi responsum' [Since theological statements, to which it is necessary to answer, are proposed by someone who is in our view not a theologian, we shall provide, in adequate proportion to our small talents, a small answer] (*Ibid.*).

the polemical tone of the two main texts that the 1533 edition was arranged and formulated in such a way as to achieve maximum impact as a diatribe against, as Agrippa saw it, the obscurantism of the university theologians and also as a criticism of those sovereigns who used the theologians as consultants, such as the Emperor Charles V. As such, it constitutes an extension of the passages criticizing theologians and monarchs in *De incertitudine*. Agrippa is thus conscientiously building on the effect which *De incertitudine* had as a denunciation of the conservative theologians. More generally, the publication of the *Apologia* and *Querela* in 1533 appears to have been part of a true publicity offensive mounted by Agrippa between 1532 and 1534 against the professional theologians and other conservative churchmen who were also trying to prevent the publication of *De occulta philosophia*. Practically all of Agrippa's writings written or published during the last three years of his life, namely the apologies of *De incertitudine*, the preface for the edition of the selected writings of the cistercian monk Godoschalcus Moncordius, the address to the City Council of Cologne, the publication of the polemic on the marital status of Saint Anne, and the (now lost) book on the scandalous and heretical passages in the works of the Cologne Dominicans, were indeed written for that one purpose. The 1533 or 1534 dedicatory epistle of *De beatissimae Annae monogamia* illustrates this point in a particularly significant way, because it leaves no doubt as to the fact that it was the treacherous attack of the Louvain theologians which prompted Agrippa to publish, so many years after the event, the documents concerning the quarrel on the triple marriage of Saint Anne.²¹ The preface to the selected writings of Godoschalcus Moncordius and the letter to the authorities of Cologne, both also from 1533, confirm the perception that Agrippa was, during the last years of his life, on a truly determined and irresistible campaign against the conservative theologians.²²

After these general observations on the 1533 edition, let us now turn to the analysis of the content of the *Articuli*.

²¹ *De beatissimae Annae monogamia*, fol. A iij^{r-v}; *Epistolae*, 7, 35, d.d. 1533, pp. 1060–1061.

²² *Epistolae*, 7, 37, d.d. 1533 and 7, 26, d.d. 11 January 1533, pp. 1063–1064 and 1037 ff. See chapter 1 above, pp. 45–46.

4. *The Articuli*

The Louvain theologians criticized *De incertitudine* on the same grounds as the Sorbonne, though they did not use the term 'Lutheran' to characterize the objections they had. Their criticism is also more detailed and equipped with references to source texts backing up the accusations. What exactly are their accusations?

The Louvain theologians attacked Agrippa's thesis that the arts and sciences are bad for man's soul and the thesis that the arts and sciences have no intrinsic value, as two heretical statements ('assertiones'; we shall return below to the exact meaning of 'assertio' in this context). Their motivation is that on the one hand Agrippa contradicts Saint Augustine, who maintains at several places that the arts and sciences are useful if not necessary for theologians, as well as various passages in the Bible (e.g. Proverbs 9, 3) and Aristotle on the other hand, who counted the sciences among the 'bona honorabilia.' They also observed that Agrippa's thesis opposes a provision in the *Decretum Gratiani*, which contains a citation in favor of the liberal arts from Saint Jerome's commentary on the *Letter to Titus* (D. 37 c. 10).²³

Next, the theologians branded a series of individual statements from a number of chapters as 'propositiones piarum aurium offensivae' [statements which are offensive to pious ears].²⁴ These statements, collected rather haphazardly and arbitrarily from various chapters of *De incertitudine*, are listed below in the order and wording of the *Articuli* (sometimes the *Articuli* paraphrase rather than quote the original). In some cases, the *Articuli* include page references to the first edition of *De incertitudine*, that is, the edition of September 1530; these references are not included in the survey below. It is unclear why the theologians enumerated the statements in such a disorderly fashion. Where applicable, the reason for the condemnation is added:

1. 'Canones sacerdotes sublati honestis nuptiis turpiter scortari compellunt' [The rules of canon law force priests to associate scandalously with harlots, because honorable marriage is denied to them] (Chapter 64, ed. 1531, fol. 90^v; expunged from the *Opera*-edition).

²³ *Apologia*, fols. B iij^r–B iijj^v.

²⁴ *Apologia*, fols. B iijj^v–B viii^r.

This sentence is interpreted as implying that it is the rule of human law, not the Bible, which forbids priests to marry. This statement is attacked with the argument that since the death of Christ, priests have not married, aside from those who were severely tempted.

2. Under the second heading, three statements are condemned:
 - ‘Surrexit his temporibus ex theologorum schola invictus haereticus Lutherus’ [In this time, an unconquered heretic has stood up from the school of theologians, namely Luther];
 - ‘ideo vos scire volo, ne putetis non etiam theologos esse lenones’ [I wish you to know (this), so that you will realize that even theologians are procurers];
 - ‘quicunque principes, iudices et magistratus lupanaria foveant aut permittunt, dicetur illis a Domino illud psalmographi: Si videbas furem’ [To all rulers, judges and magistrates who encourage or condone the existence of brothels, God will say in the words of the psalmist ‘When you see thieves,’ etc.] (Chapter 64, ed. 1531, fols. 91^r and 92^v; *Opera*, pp. 171 and 173; Psalm 50 [49 in the Vulgate], 18 ff. is quoted. The name of Luther is expunged from the *Opera*-edition.)

The objections against the first two statements are not explained. The third statement is objected to, because it implies criticism of the authorities who condone prostitution. In defense of the authorities, the censors refer to a statement of Saint Augustine, *De adulterinis coniugiis*, 2, 15, to the effect that it is permissible to do a lesser evil in order to avoid a greater one (‘Si facturus est quod non licet, faciat adulterium, non homicidium’ [If he must do what is not permitted, let him commit adultery, not murder]. The *Articuli* mention that this passage is included in the *Decretum Gratiani* (C. 33 q. 2 c. 9).

3. ‘Mercatores et milites veram paenitentiam agere non possunt’ [Merchants and soldiers cannot truly do penance] (Chapter 72, ed. 1531, fol. 104^r; *Opera*, p. 199).
4. ‘Augustinus et Bernardus contra Christi sensum bella permittunt’ [Augustine and Bernard permit warfare, against the intention of Christ]; ‘Et Christo repugnante ordo militantium est in ecclesia’ [Even against the will of Christ there exists a congregation of

soldiers in the Church]²⁵ (Chapter 79, ed. 1531, fol. 109^v; *Opera*, p. 210).

5. 'Habere imagines in templis non est absque idolatriae vitio sive periculo' [To have statues in churches is not without the sin of idolatry or danger thereof] (Chapter 25, ed. 1531, fol. 38^v; *Opera*, p. 59).
6. 'Diabolus est auctor cucullae' [The devil is the inventor of the monk's hood] (Chapter 25; ed. 1531, fol. 39^r; *Opera*, p. 60).
7. 'Moses, David, Apostoli, Evangelistae, prophetae, homines fuerunt, et a veritate in quibusdam defecerunt et mendaces in quibusdam inventi sunt' [Moses, David, the apostles, the evangelists, the prophets, were men, and they lacked in certain respects the knowledge of the truth, and in certain respects they have been found out to be mendacious] (Chapter 90, ed. 1531, fols. 149^{r-v}; *Opera*, p. 294).

The objection to this statement is that it implies that the Bible contains uncertainties, and that its true meaning can only be understood by those who are inspired and that Scripture is self-evident, as Agrippa claims later (see below *sub* 8). Against this view, several biblical texts are quoted, among which 2 Peter 1, 20–21 ('Know this first of all, that there is no prophecy of scripture that is a matter of personal interpretation, for no prophecy ever came through human will; but rather human beings moved by the Holy Spirit spoke under the influence of God'). The point of the criticism is that the prophets, being inspired by the Holy Spirit, could make no mistakes ('quia semper est unus sensus verus a Deo intellectus').

8. Under the eighth heading, three statements are cited:
 - 'Verbi dei scientiam nulla philosophorum schola, nulla theologorum sorbona, nec quorumcunque gymnasia scholasticorum nobis tradidere sed solus deus atque Christus' [Not one school of philosophers, not one Sorbonne Faculty of theologians, not one of all the scholastic schools together has taught us the knowledge of the word of God, but only God and Christ have done so];

²⁵ Agrippa is referring to a military religious order called the Knights Hospitalers of St. John of Jerusalem, which had been founded at the time of the Crusades.

- ‘Cui nihil addere licet neque detrahere’ [to which (i.e. the word of God) it is not permitted to add anything, nor to subtract anything from it];
 - ‘nulla patitur externa commentaria, nullas humanas aut angelicas glossas’ [it does not allow for external commentaries, or for glossing by men or angels] (Chapter 100; ed. 1531, fols. 151^{r-v}; *Opera*, p. 298. The words ‘nulla theologorum sorbona’ are expunged from the *Opera*-edition).
9. ‘Nulla res Christianae fidei et religioni tam repugnat quam scientia, minusque se invicem compatiuntur’ [Nothing is so much opposed to Christian faith and religion as science, no two things are more incompatible with each other] (Chapter 101, ed. 1531, fol. 155^r; *Opera*, p. 305).
 10. ‘Discedite ab humanarum traditionum nebulis’ [Seclude yourselves from the clouds of human learning] (*Operis peroratio*, ed. 1531, fol. 158^r; *Opera*, p. 313).
 11. ‘Caeremonias exteriores despicit Deus nec vult coli actionibus corporalibus et sensibilibus operibus’ [God despises formal ceremonies and He does not want to be worshipped by means of physical actions and material works] (Chapter 60, ed. 1531, fol. 77^r; *Opera*, p. 141).

This statement is countered by means of 1 Corinthians 13, 1 ff. (‘If I speak in human and angelic tongues, but do not have love, I am a resounding gong or a clashing cymbal,’ etc.). The point of this criticism is formulated as follows: ‘Charitas igitur excitat et promovet ad corporales actiones et sensibilia opera’ [Charity thus excites and promotes physical actions and works of the senses].

Next, the theologians observe that Agrippa’s conclusion that sciences are vain (‘vanitas scientiarum’) implies that they will end with this world. They attack this view by means of a statement from St. Jerome: ‘Discamus in terris quorum scientia nobis perseueret in coelo’ [Let us learn on earth the knowledge which shall stay with us in heaven],²⁶

²⁶ The quotation is from St. Jerome’s *Synopsis Bibliothecae divinae* (Patrologia Latina, vol. 28, 145–146).

and they observe that the famous proverbial statement of Ecclesiastes concerning vanity (1, 2 and 12, 8) does not offer real, but only apparent, support of Agrippa's thesis, for the following reason:

Quamvis igitur Ecclesiasticus ostendat quaecunque sunt in mundo vanitatem esse non tamen omnia damnat, verum reprehendit consilia hominum, qui in hoc mundo spem suam posuisse videntur. (*Apologia*, fols. B vii^v–B viii^r)

So although the Ecclesiastes shows that everything in the world is vanity, he nonetheless does not condemn everything, but he censures the judgement of those men who seem to put their hope in this world.

Finally, the theologians discredit as offensive a statement from the dedicatory epistle to Augustinus Furnarius. In this statement, briefly discussed above in chapter 3, Agrippa says that he was transformed into a dog in order to speak ill and declaim against the arts and sciences. By means of this statement, the theologians observe, Agrippa admits himself that his declamation is libellous, insulting and offensive to pious ears ('famosus, contumeliosus, ac piarum aurium offensivus').

As the above survey shows, the objections of the Louvain theologians are more numerous than those of the Sorbonne, but offer no more substance to prove that Agrippa attacked the principles of the Christian faith. Another, and far more important, difference between the two attacks is the fact that the accusations of the Louvain theologians were not published, but were meant to remain secret. It is uncertain whether Margaret of Austria saw the secret document containing the *Articuli* (she died on 1 December 1530), but it circulated for nearly a year, without Agrippa's knowledge, in court circles and among the members of the Imperial Privy Counsel in Brussels and the *Parlement* of Malines.²⁷ A copy of the Louvain document was shown to Agrippa as late as December 1531 through the intermediary of Jean Carondelet II, who had been newly elected president of the Emperor's Privy Council. The document was delivered together with a summons from the Emperor ordering Agrippa to retract publicly the passages attacked by the academic censors (*Apologia*, fol. A vii^v). The action which had been staged by the clergymen at the Imperial court to damage Agrippa had thus completely succeeded.

²⁷ See, for this and subsequent events, Agrippa's account in *Apologia*, fols. A vii^r–B iij^r.

5. *Agrippa's reaction to the Articuli*

When Agrippa received the Louvain document and the summons of the Emperor, he was beside himself and refused to revoke any of the incriminated sections of his book. The introduction to the *Apologia* and the *Querela* explain the reason for his anger.²⁸ Agrippa felt that the theologians had unjustly accused him of heresy, and that the Emperor had treated him unjustly by not giving him the opportunity to defend himself against the charges. The thought that he had been the victim of injustice preoccupied his mind to such a degree that he expressed it in the form of a maxim at the head of the introduction, thus indicating the theme of the two apologies: 'Nolite secundum faciem iudicare, sed rectum iudicium iudicate' [Do not seek to judge on the basis of appearances, but administer justice rightly].²⁹

In the introduction, Agrippa motivates his indignation over the Emperor's role in the affair by observing that it is the task of a good ruler to ensure that a defendant receives a fair trial. To support this observation, he refers to historical examples. In ancient times, it was possible for men who felt treated unjustly to appeal to King Philip of Macedonia, and he adds that in his own day it is possible to appeal in similar cases to the pope. Furthermore, he quotes several Old and New Testament and legal testimonies (namely Festus) showing that verdicts must not be pronounced without a fair trial. He also remarks that both Athenian laws and the laws of the Twelve Tables honored the principle that both sides must be heard, adding several examples to show that this principle was always put into practice, even during the administration of the worst Roman emperors.³⁰ On the other hand, when a fair trial fails to take place, Agrippa argues, all accusations always remain unproved and consequently, the defendant in question should receive the benefit of the doubt until he is able to prove his innocence. To support this last argument he quotes additional testimonies from Biblical, juridical and theological sources.³¹ In the *Querela* Agrippa once more stresses how blameworthy the Emperor's role in the affair was, since he had acted as a dishonest judge, condemning the defendant solely on the basis of the malicious allega-

²⁸ *Apologia*, fols. A vii^r-B ij^v.

²⁹ *Apologia*, fol. A vii^r. The motto is repeated in the appeal to the *Parlement* of Malines at the end of the *Apologia*, fol. I viii^v.

³⁰ *Apologia*, fols. A viii^v-B i^r.

³¹ *Apologia*, fols. B i^r-B ij^r.

tions of his opponents, without granting him a fair trial. In this passage Agrippa added more historical material to substantiate his claim.³²

Agrippa's indignation at the conduct of the Louvain theologians was similar to what he had felt at the conduct of Catilinet in 1509 and of Salin in 1518, namely that the theologians had issued the grave accusation of heresy³³ behind his back, in a secret document, thus depriving him of the opportunity to defend himself.³⁴ In the *Querela*, this frustration with his own fate is linked with a more general complaint about the intellectual and moral crisis of his time, identifying the scholastic theologians and members of the monastic orders as the culprits, and men like Pico, Reuchlin, Lefèvre d'Étaples and of course Erasmus as the main victims.³⁵ It is specially thanks to passages such as this that the 1533 edition containing the *Apologia* and *Querela* constitutes not only Agrippa's personal defense against the theologians of Louvain, but also a manifesto championing humanist theology.

6. *The basis of Agrippa's defense: allegiance to the Church of Rome*

The starting-point and continuous touchstone of Agrippa's self-defense is the assurance that he is a good Catholic. This statement implies that he unconditionally submits to the authority of the Church of Rome, and is willing to revoke any statements which he might have inadvertently made against the teachings of Rome. Agrippa narrates that it was in this spirit of modesty that he asked to be shown the Louvain document after he had heard about its existence:

Quod tandem ubi rescissem, supplicavi apud utrunque senatum, impe-
tratis etiam literis a Reverendissimo domino archiepiscopo Panormitano,
supremo privati Caesaris consilii praeside, ut mihi articulorum illorum
daretur transsumptum, quo illorum admonitione discerem quid mihi vel

³² *Querela*, fols. L iiij^{r-v}.

³³ 'Error, impietas, scandalum et forte etiam haeresis,' is the full expression which Agrippa uses to define the nature of the allegations (*Apologia*, Address to the members of the *Parlement*, fol. B ij^v); compare fol. A vii^r, where he defines the nature of the allegations as 'haeresis, impietas, scandalum.'

³⁴ Agrippa also expresses his indignation in the dedicatory epistle of the 1533 to his protector Lorenzo Campeggi (*Apologia*, fols. A iiij^r-A vi^v; also in *Epistolae*, 7, 12, n.d., pp. 1008-1010). In the conclusion of the *Apologia*, chapter 43, fol. I vi^v, Agrippa once more expresses his feelings of indignation with the Louvain theologians.

³⁵ *Querela*, fol. K iiij^r ff.

explicandum, vel corrigendum, vel emendandum, vel revocandum esset, paratus cognito errore, illum christiana modestia retractare. (*Apologia*, introduction, fol. A vii^v)

When I finally found out about it [i.e. the attack of the Louvain theologians], I implored both authorities [i.e. the *Parlement* of Malines and the Privy Council in Brussels], even after I had received a letter from the most reverend Lord, the archbishop of Palermo, president of the Privy Council of the Emperor, to be sent a transcript of those *Articuli*, in order that I might learn by means of the admonition formulated in them, what I must clarify, or correct, or revise, or revoke, ready as I am to rescind with Christian modesty any error as soon as I am aware of it.

More specifically, Agrippa argues that nothing in *De incertitudine* was written with the purpose of challenging the doctrine of the Church:

Quod si mihi concedatur haec respondendi facultas, ostendam me nihil unquam assertive scripsisse, credere, aut tenere, cuius contrarium asserit, credit, sentit et tenet ecclesia catholica. (*Apologia*, introduction, fols. B i^{r-v})

And if this opportunity to write a response is granted to me, I shall show that I have never written as a doctrinal statement, nor believe or hold for true, anything that is the opposite of what the Catholic church affirms as doctrine, or believes, or feels, or holds for true.

At the end of the first chapter of the *Apologia* Agrippa returns to this point. In order to prove that the Louvain theologians had distorted the tenor of his declamation with malicious intentions, Agrippa fully admits that his work is extremely censorious and he observes that many people who read it were shocked and felt insulted, yet at the same time he emphasizes that no reader had so far discovered any heresies in it. He formulates this last thought in the following sentence, in which we see once more his willingness to enter into discussion with his opponent:

Tamen in ea semper opinione sum, quod impiam mentem in scriptis meis nullus inveniet. Esto, sint multa quae moderatius, quae circumspectius, quae eruditius tractari potuissent, sit etiam a me alicubi erratum, scio enim me hominem esse et labi posse, semper tamen sincerus animus est, et me catholicum esse profiteor, nec usque adeo declamatoriae licentiae me indulsisse puto, quod ab orthodoxa fide desciverim, aut meo lapsu scandalum dederim ecclesiae, neque gravabor, sicubi erravi,

magistrorum nostrorum subire censuram et ex eorum monitis errorem meum corrigere, modo meminerint ipsi se quoque homines esse, et labi posse iudicando, quemadmodum ego illis videor lapsus in scribendo. (*Apologia*, chapter 1, fol. C iij^r)

Yet I am at all times convinced that nobody will find proof of a profane mind in my writings. I grant that there are many things which might have been treated more moderately, more cautiously, more academically, and likewise, even that I might have committed an error somewhere, because I know that I am a human being and can make a mistake. Yet my mind is always sincere and I profess to be a Catholic, and I believe that I have not indulged in the liberty granted by the declamation to such an extent that I have become an apostate of the orthodox faith or that I have brought shame on the church by my error. And if I have committed an error somewhere, I will not feel troubled if I suffer the reprimand of our *magistri*, and I will amend my error according to their admonitions, on condition that they remember that they too are human beings and can make a mistake in their judgment, just as they feel that I have made a mistake in my writing.

In order to show that Agrippa's submission to the Church was sincere, it is useful to review some of the passages in Agrippa's writings which contain explicit statements of allegiance to the Church. Agrippa, like all his contemporaries, humanists, adherents of the Reformation and scholastic theologians alike, accepted only one thing unconditionally, namely Christian truth as revealed through Scripture. He also accepted, unlike the adherents of the Reformation, the right of the Roman Church to formulate in the form of dogmas, and to disseminate and enforce by its authority, all religious truths, either those revealed to us directly or those attained by consensus in the ecclesiastical tradition. It is because the soundness of his religious opinions as a member of the Church was contested by various theologians throughout his lifetime that Agrippa often pledged allegiance to it ('*sanctissimam Christi ecclesiam, fidei matrem, doctricem veritatis*,' as he called it in the *Defensio*, fol. E i^r). Let us consider two clear examples of how Agrippa pledges allegiance to the Church after he was attacked of heresy.

In 1509, the provincial superior of the Franciscans raised suspicions concerning the orthodoxy of Agrippa's public lectures at the university of Dôle on Reuchlin's *De verbo mirifico*. The suspicions were raised in a Lenten sermon pronounced in Agrippa's absence, namely in Gent. The general content of Agrippa's response to this charge,

the *Expostulatio*, written a year later from London, has been summarized in chapter 1 above. Here, we cite only the concrete answer which Agrippa gave to the twofold accusation that he had shown himself to be a judaising heretic who introduced the prohibited art of cabbala into Christian theology and that he preferred the Jewish rabbis to the Church fathers and the Christian theologians:

Verum ego Christianus sum, nec mors, nec vita separabit me a fide Christi, Christianosque doctores omnibus praefero. (*Collected Treatises*, fol. D 2^v; *Opera*, p. 494)

But I am a Christian. Neither death nor life will separate me from faith in Christ, and I endorse the Christian scholars more than all the other ones (*in casu* the Jewish rabbis).

Later on in this same letter, he returns to this point in greater detail:

Quaenam pars mea cum Iudaeis, qui Christum Iesum confiteor filium Dei et piissime colo? Quid ego inter haereticos, qui ecclesiae veram unitatem, ipsiusque saluberrima praecepta ritusque sacrorum concilio-rum et canonum, quibus fides firmatur et ab omni iniqua haeresi purgatur, pro viribus meis observo et doceo? (*Collected Treatises*, fol. D 3^v; *Opera*, p. 495)

What do I, who profess that Jesus Christ is the son of God and worship Him most piously, have in common with the Jews? Why am I placed among the heretics, since I respect to the best of my ability and stand up in my lectures for the true unity of the Church, its most vital precepts and the usages introduced by the sacred councils and canons, through which faith is corroborated and cleansed from all perverse heresy?

After this unequivocal declaration of allegiance to the Church of Rome and its teaching, Agrippa asks, more in sadness than in anger, why his opponent chose to charge him with heresy behind his back, in a distant place, with the sole purpose of blackening his good name, rather than confronting him personally in public in order to allow him to learn from the reprimand. In this text, Agrippa does not express his criticism of the opponent's behavior aggressively, but very subtly, stressing his desire to learn from his opponent, who, as a doctor in theology and a Franciscan, is an important member of the Christian community,

Ego quoque de eodem Christi corpore do operam, ut saltem aliquod vel parvum membrum sim, sum enim ego Christianus, et disco quotidie libenter a magnis magistris, qualis tu es unus, quae ad nostram religionem pertineant, in quibus procul dubio me multum oblecto. (*Collected Treatises*, fol. D 4^v; *Opera*, p. 497)

I for my part am trying to be a member, however modest, of that same body of Christ, because I am a Christian and I learn daily from great masters such as you the things which have to do with our religion, in which I find without any doubt my full delight.³⁶

In 1518, Agrippa was attacked in Metz for defending the condemned opinion of Lefèvre d'Étaples on the *trinubium* of Saint Anne. Let us briefly repeat the main points of this incident, which was discussed more fully in chapter 1. Agrippa had declared himself to be a supporter of Lefèvre's view in a private conversation. When the substance of the conversation got out, some theologians attacked Agrippa in sermons delivered to the ordinary people throughout Metz. In response to this challenge, Agrippa distributed a series of *Propositiones* clarifying Lefèvre's view. To this invitation to a public debate, a number of *Conclusiones* were offered, attacking Lefèvre's (and thus also Agrippa's) view, issued anonymously by the Dominican Salin. Agrippa started his *Propositiones*, his response to the anonymous attack, with the observation that learned discussion concerning the *trinubium* of Saint Anne is permitted, because it is not a matter of faith and the Church has not formulated an official doctrine concerning it:

Qui dicit fidem nostram vel ecclesiam tenere et asserere beatissimae virginis genitricem Annam tres habuisse maritos ac tres peperisse filias, dicit falsum manifestum, et qui id publica contione pertinaciter praedicare ausus est, seducit populum et adulteratur verbum Dei, ac in sede veritatis docet notorium mendacium. Nam res haec fidei non est, nec ecclesia de hac aliquid ulla sanctione vel facto determinavit. (*Propositiones*, fols. A vi^v–A vii^r)

He who says that our faith or the Church maintain and assert that Anne, the mother of the blessed virgin, had three husbands and gave birth to three daughters, says something which is manifestly wrong.

³⁶ Agrippa refers here to Romans 12, Galatians 6, 1 and 2 Thessalonians 3, 15, passages in which St. Paul urges the early Christians to admonish and help each other on the way to faith in a brotherly manner, not to stand against each other like enemies.

Furthermore, he who has dared to divulge this thought with obstinacy in a public sermon, corrupts the people and falsifies the word of God, and teaches an infamous lie instead of the truth. For this is not a matter of faith, and the Church has not concluded anything concerning it in any sanction or edict.

For this reason, Agrippa's fourth *Propositio* defines the topic, as we have seen above in chapter 3, as a 'dubium, disputabile, in utramque partem probabile' [an uncertain, debatable matter, for which pro and con arguments can be adduced] (*Propositiones*, fol. A vii^v), that is, a topic on which scholars are allowed to disagree and to exchange ideas on the basis of arguments.

In this context, Agrippa stresses that the sole function of scholarly debate is to contribute to the search for the truth concerning the matter at hand. This latter thought is most clearly expressed by Agrippa when he explains that he had issued the fourteen *Propositiones* as an introduction to a scholarly debate on the matter:

Quibus [sc. propositionibus] si quis contrariis rationibus ac auctoritatibus validioribus sese opponere velit, occasionem mihi dabit scripta haec gravioribus studiis dilatandi, donec ille oppugnans, ego repugnans, ad commodum christianae reipublicae, uterque optatum finem (cuius gratia solum licet christianis contendere) assequamur, ipsam videlicet quaesitam rei veritatem, eamque caeteris, qui in ignorantiae caligine versantur, salubriter ostendamus. (*Propositiones*, fol. A vi^v)³⁷

If somebody wishes to compete against these propositions with arguments to the contrary and more forceful authoritative statements, he will provide me with the opportunity to expand this writing [i.e., the fourteen *Propositiones*] into a more substantial study, until both of us, he by offering resistance and I by presenting a defense to the benefit of the Christian commonwealth, will reach the end for which we strive and which constitutes the sole reason for which Christians may compete, namely the truth of the matter, which is what we both seek, and will show it advantageously to those who find themselves in the darkness of ignorance.

³⁷ Compare Lefèvre's statement in a letter to Agrippa: 'Non, obsecro, aegre feras, quod multi scriptis meis tum de Magdalena, tum de Anna adversentur. Existimo aliquando futurum, ut harum rerum perspectior sit veritas, de quibus discepto solum et nihil temere diffinio' [Please, I implore you, do not regret that many oppose my writings on Mary Magdalene and Anne. I feel that there will come a time when the truth about these matters, about which I merely debate and do not affirm anything boldly, will be clearer] (*Epistolae*, 2, 28, d.d. 20 May 1519, p. 676).

Since Agrippa's opponent so manifestly frustrated the necessary open exchange of arguments on the matter by issuing an anonymous discourse against the *Propositiones*, Agrippa not only refutes his opponent's arguments in the *Defensio*, but also denounces his lack of willingness to enter into an open discussion in which an exchange of arguments can take place. Agrippa's frustration with his opponent's behavior is clearly formulated at the beginning of the *Defensio*, the treatise in which Agrippa refuted word for word the objections of the Dominican who wrote the *Conclusiones*. In the introduction to the *Defensio*, the self-defense switches immediately into a counter-attack:

Conabor itaque ipsas oppositarum conclusionum machinas elidere penitusque disrumpere, atque Fabrum ipsum, tam veracis sacratissimaeque historiae reparatorem, meque una, et caeteros nobiscum probe sentientes, eximere calumniis. Vellem autem quod conclusionarius iste doctor (quod probum disputatorem decet) non sic ex occulto in me sagittaret, ita quod telum ac vulnum sentiens, iaculatorem ignorem, sed illas suas dogmaticas obiectiunculas, quas in secreto aliquot mulierculas docet, imperitosque nobiles proprio suo quo vocatur nomine praetitulasset, sic namque ipse a calumniandi tergiversandique crimine (quapropter nomen suum oculuisse haud iniuria aestimatur) relinqueretur minus suspectus. At ego cognoscerem qui cum mihi negotium hoc suscipitur, haberemque illi condecens reverentiam, atque pro dignitate tractarem, nunc autem Andabatarum more pugnare compellor ac hostem non videns directa spicula repellere. (*Defensio*, fols. B iv^v–B v^r)

Therefore I shall try to knock down and destroy completely this bulwark of the *conclusiones* against me, and to rescue from defamation Lefèvre d'Étaples himself, the restorer of the true and most holy account, and with him myself and all those who hold, like us, the honorable opinion [i.e. concerning the triple marriage of Saint Anne]. But I wish that the author of the *conclusiones* with his title of doctor, as behooves a respectable debater, had not thrown his javelin at me from a hidden spot, with the result that I feel the missile and the wound, but do not know the thrower. I wish he had written his name at the head of those worthless doctrinal objections of his, which he teaches in secret to some simple women and some nobles who know nothing. Thus he would have given less the impression that he is guilty of maligning and evading, for that is why people assume, and not without reason, that he has withheld his name. As for me, I would know with whom I have to contend and would honor him fittingly and treat him with due respect. But now I am forced to fight like the *andabatae* [i.e. gladiators who

fought with a helmet having no visor] and to avert the spears thrown at me while I cannot see my enemy.

Like the introduction, the main part of the *Defensio* is formulated in a far more aggressive tone than the *Expostulatio* of nine years earlier. In this respect (and also with regard to the format and size) the *Defensio* resembles the *Apologia*. As was suggested in chapter one above, the *Defensio* in fact possibly received its definitive form as late as the early thirties, when Agrippa felt himself provoked to the utmost by the attacks of the theologians against his integrity and their unwillingness to enter into an open, substantial debate about differences of opinions between them and the humanistic theologians. But even if this hypothesis is incorrect, the dedicatory epistle of *De beatissimae Annae monogamia* shows clearly that at least the decision to publish the documents so many years after the actual quarrel was inspired by Agrippa's outrage with the secret attack against *De incertitudine*. It is thus clear that both writings are inspired by his indignation against the intolerant behavior of the scholastic theologians toward their humanistic opponents.

7. Agrippa's defense against the Articuli: the *Apologia*

After this description of the basis of Agrippa's self-defense, it is time to look at its content. Agrippa's detailed rebuttal is included in the *Apologia*, which comprises 43 chapters. Their content can be schematically represented as follows:³⁸

- In chapters 1 and 2 (fols. C i^r–C vii^r) Agrippa responds to the fact that the theologians used the term 'assertio' to label his main thesis.
- In chapters 3–11 (fols. C vii^r–E i^r) Agrippa discusses the objection to his thesis that arts and sciences are bad for man's soul, and he examines the testimonies on which the objection is based.

³⁸ The modern German translation by Max Krieg, appended to the 1913 edition by Felix Mauthner of the eighteenth-century German translation of *De incertitudine*, is a useful aid for studying the content of the *Apologia*. It must be noted, however, that Krieg has omitted all the references to the Corpus iuris canonici (specially the *Decretum Gratiani*), and that he has sometimes abbreviated Agrippa's text (e.g. at the end of chapters 29, 30 and 32).

- In chapters 12–14 (fols. E i^v–E iij^r) Agrippa discusses the objection to his thesis that arts and sciences do not have any intrinsic value, and he examines the testimonies on which the objection is based.
- Chapter 15 (fol. E iij^v) contains a brief comment on the following sentence in the *Articuli*: ‘Sequuntur aliae propositiones piarum aurium offensivae’ [Here follow other propositions that are offensive to pious ears]. Agrippa deduces from the term ‘propositiones piarum aurium offensivae’ that the term ‘assertiones’ denotes theses considered to be heretical and blasphemous.
- In chapters 16–18 (fols. E iij^v–E v^v) Agrippa discusses the objection to the sentence ‘Canones sacerdotes sublati honestis nuptiis turpiter scortari compellunt.’
- In chapters 19–22 (fols. E v^v–F ij^v) Agrippa discusses the objection to the sentences: ‘Surrexit his temporibus ex theologorum schola invictus haereticus Lutherus’; ‘ideo vos scire volo, ne putetis non etiam theologos esse lenones’; ‘quicumque principes, iudices et magistratus lupanaria foveant aut permittunt, dicetur illis a Domino illud psalmographi: Si videbas furem,’ etc.
- In chapter 23 (fols. F ij^v–F iij^v) Agrippa discusses the objection to the sentence: ‘Mercatores et milites veram paenitentiam agere non possunt.’
- In chapters 24–25 (fols. F iij^v–F vii^v) Agrippa discusses the objections to the sentences: ‘Augustinus et Bernardus contra Christi sensum bella permittunt’; ‘Et Christo repugnante ordo militantium est in ecclesia.’
- In chapter 26 (fols. F vii^v–G i^r) Agrippa discusses the objection to the sentence: ‘Habere imagines in templis non est absque idolatriae vitio sive periculo.’
- In chapter 27 (fols. G i^v–G iij^r) Agrippa discusses the objection to the sentence: ‘Diabolus est auctor cucullae.’
- In chapters 28–32 (fols. G iij^v–H iij^r) Agrippa discusses the objection to the sentence: ‘Moses, David, Apostoli, Evangelistae, prophetae homines fuerunt et a veritate in quibusdam defecerunt, et mendaces in quibusdam inventi sunt,’ and the Biblical testimonies cited to justify the objection.
- In chapters 33–35 (fols. H iij^r–H viii^r) Agrippa discusses the objections to the sentences: ‘Verbi dei scientiam nulla philosophorum schola, nulla theologorum sorbona, nec quorumcunque gymnasia scholasticorum nobis tradidere sed solus Deus atque Christus’; ‘cui

nihil addere licet neque detrahere'; 'nulla patitur externa commentaria, nullas humanas aut angelicas glossas.'

- In chapter 36 (fols. H viii^{r-v}) Agrippa discusses the objection to the sentence: 'Nulla res Christianae fidei et religioni tam repugnat quam scientia, minusque se invicem compatiuntur.' This chapter constitutes a brief summary of Agrippa's main thesis that faith and reason (science) are incompatible.³⁹
- In chapter 37 (fol. H viii^v) Agrippa discusses the objection to the sentence: 'Discedite ab humanarum traditionum nebulis.'
- In chapters 38–39 (fols. I i^r–I ii^j^r) Agrippa discusses the objection to the sentence: 'Caeremonias exteriores despicit Deus, nec vult coli actionibus corporalibus, et sensibilibus operibus.'
- In chapters 40–42 (fols. I ii^j^v–I v^v) Agrippa discusses the objection that *De incertitudine* concludes with the judgment that the sciences are finite ('capiunt finem in hoc seculo') and the condemnation of this judgment.
- In chapter 43 (fols. I v^v–I vi^v) Agrippa discusses the theologians' discontent with the dedicatory epistle of *De incertitudine*, in which Agrippa says that he turned himself into a dog in order to declaim against the arts and sciences.

The self-defense includes two components. The first is formed by Agrippa's argument that the theologians misunderstood the purport of *De incertitudine* because they do not understand the genre of the declamation. In order to substantiate this crucial argument, Agrippa discusses the character and function of the humanist declamation in chapters 1, 3 and 42. In these passages, Agrippa claims to immunity from the theologians' accusations on account of the rhetorical character of declamations. In order to understand that these passages must not be interpreted as a weak and dishonest, but as a substantial and serious defense, it is necessary to analyze them in detail and connect them with Agrippa's pledge of allegiance to the Church. The following chapter will be devoted in its entirety to this analysis.

The second component of the *Apologia* is Agrippa's refutation of each individual objection of the theologians, in which he shows that the accusations, in addition to being fundamentally unwarranted, also reveal the theologians' prejudice and incompetence. More specifically,

³⁹ Thus it is referred to by Sebastian Franck in his *Paradoxa*, ed. Wollgast, p. 379.

he uses four different arguments to make his point: (1) the censors give a biased interpretation of his words; (2) the source material used by the censors to underpin their objections is cited or interpreted in an inaccurate manner; (3) the censors support their objections with completely irrelevant remarks; (4) finally, he criticizes the censors' quarrelsome character.

Let us now briefly discuss each kind of refutation and cite one example of each strategy.

(1) Agrippa observes that various objections consist merely of insinuations or false suggestions concerning the purport of a particular sentence in *De incertitudine*. In the brief, derogatory remarks which face the text of the *Articuli* (fols. B iij^r–B viii^r; see above p. 125), Agrippa labels these objections, or rather insinuations, with the following expressions: 'argumentari per verbum videtur' (fol. B iij^v), 'divinatio per quasi' (fols. B iiij^v; B v^r; B vi^r) or 'divinatio per videtur' (fol. B vii^v). The objections in question are discussed in chapters 4, 12, 22, 29, and 40.

The general point which Agrippa makes against these objections is that it is not permitted to pronounce a person guilty of heresy or impiety or offence on the basis of mere insinuations. In chapter 40, for example, Agrippa discusses the observation of the theologians that he, in the final chapters of *De incertitudine*, seems to maintain ('videtur asserere') that the sciences are finite, that is, that they end in this world. According to the *Articuli*, this claim is at variance with St. Jerome's judgment: 'Discamus in terris quorum scientia nobis perseveret in coelo' [Let us learn on earth the knowledge which shall stay with us in heaven]⁴⁰ (fol. B vii^v).

To defend himself, Agrippa answers in chapter 40 that the censors are declaring him to be a heretic on the basis of an insinuation. This means, Agrippa observes, not only that the charge can be easily invalidated by simply stating that the insinuation does not reflect the author's real intention, but it also goes against the accepted procedure followed in the refutation of heretics. Agrippa does not dwell upon this last point here, but in chapter 12 he makes the same point, referring, as proof, to the testimony of Saint Jerome, *Ad Ctesiphontem*, who says that it is only permissible to call a person a heretic if he demonstrably contradicts the Bible. In chapter 40, Agrippa goes on to explain the intention of *De incertitudine*. He says that it does not

⁴⁰ St. Jerome, *Synopsis Bibliothecae divinae* (Patrologia Latina, vol. 28, 145–146).

defend the thesis that the sciences end with this world, but rather proposes the idea (Agrippa uses the verb 'ventilare') that rules in the arts and scientific theories go through a process of origination and development, and eventually become obsolete, so that one can say that nothing on this earth stands forever.

But the defense is coupled with a counter-attack in the form of a strongly sarcastic remark on the content of the objection itself. If the theologaster, Agrippa exclaims in a rhetorical question, is so sure of his point, then let him explain which are the things from this earth that we take with us to heaven. The *parva logicalia* perhaps? Or the *moralia Aristotelis*, or the *formalitates Scoti*? The only thing, Agrippa continues, which man needs in the afterlife is knowledge of Scripture, and that is exactly what Saint Jerome is talking about in the passage quoted by the theologians. Here, Agrippa is arguing that the censors had deliberately misinterpreted Saint Jerome to suit their argument. He defines this strategy as 'falsa applicatio' (fol. B vii^v); we shall discuss another example of this strategy, and of Agrippa's response to it, below. In order to support his own interpretation of the Saint Jerome passage, Agrippa cites two testimonies, namely Saint Jerome's comment on Isaiah: 'Si iuxta Apostolum Paulum, Christus Dei virtus et Dei sapientia est, et qui nescit scripturas, nescit Dei sapientiam' [If, according to the apostle Paul, Christ is the miracle and the wisdom of God, then he who ignores Scripture ignores the wisdom of God] and D. 38 c. 9: 'Ignorantia scripturarum est ignorantia Christi' [Ignorance with Scripture means ignorance with Christ].⁴¹ Agrippa then continues with a sarcastic diatribe against scholastic theology, in which he charges it with neglecting Scripture and focusing on arguments about futilities, and he concludes with the remark that he indeed believes that arts and sciences are finite in this world, even though he had not been saying that in the declamation.

(2) In several cases Agrippa rebuts the censors by maintaining that his arguments are supported by an irrelevant citation from authoritative texts (usually the Bible, a Church Father, or the *Decretum Gratiani*), or by a misrepresentation of historical facts. The Latin phrases used are 'futilis argumentatio' (fol. B iiij^v), 'impertinenter citare' (fol. B iiij^r), 'falsa argumentatio' (fol. B iiij^r), 'falsa assumptio' (fol. B iiij^r), 'falsa/futilis applicatio' (fols. B iiij^{r-v}), 'impertinens et detorta allegoria' (fol.

⁴¹ The quotation from Jerome's commentary on Isaiah also figures in D. 38 c. 9, and it is most likely from this source that Agrippa took it.

B iij^v). The objections in question are discussed in the chapters 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 and 13.

In order to assess how Agrippa used this strategy to refute the censors, let us look at the content of chapter 8. Here, Agrippa discusses one of the objections brought to the fore against the main thesis of *De incertitudine*. The objection is that arts and sciences are useful for theologians and that therefore the universities teach the liberal arts ('Unde cautum est ut diversis locis constituentur magistri et doctores qui studia literarum artiumque liberalium doceant' [For this reason it has been ordered that in various cities *magistri* and *doctores* are to be appointed to teach the study of letters and the liberal arts]). Agrippa calls this a false argumentation and explains his claim with the following historical survey, which not only explains his point against the Louvain theologians, but simultaneously constitutes a counter-attack against the standards and practice of education in the scholastic system. To this end, Agrippa presents the following brief history of school education.

During the time of the early Church, Christian schools taught boys and girls religion ('disciplina Dei'). These schools formed the breeding ground of all the *collegia sacerdotum* and religious orders. These, in their turn, defended faith and applied themselves not to dialectical disputes, but to the formation of the spirit ('doctrina spiritus') and the practice of virtue ('ostensio virtutis'). In later times, these scholars were distracted, for a variety of reasons, from their original goals, and in order to remedy this deterioration, the popes issued rules in their decretals concerning the activities of teachers in the schools. Now the task of these teachers was not to instruct students in invented stories (*fabulae*) and Aristotelian science, but in grammar and languages (Hebrew, Greek, Latin, Arab, Chaldaic), which enhance their understanding of Scripture. In order to prove this point, Agrippa quotes D. 9 c. 6, in which the words from Letter 28 of Saint Jerome (not Augustine, as Agrippa says) are quoted, 'ut veterum librorum fides de Hebraeis voluminibus examinanda est, ita novorum veritas graeci sermonis normam desiderat' [as the credibility of ancient books (i.e. the Old Testament) must be studied from the Hebrew texts, so the truth of the new ones (i.e. the New Testament) requires the standard of Greek]. Agrippa then deploys his counter-attack by referring back to the reference made earlier by the theologians to Augustine's *Contra Cresconium*, stressing that in this work too, Augustine recommends language training ('sermonis elegantia, grammaticae

notitia, recta ratiocinandi disciplina' [i.e., rhetoric, grammar and dialectic]) in order to advance Bible reading.⁴² He then drives the point home by remarking that it is exactly this language training of the trivium ('eloquentiae ornatum, linguarum peritiam') which the scholastic theologians are opposing with such vigor that they represent it as the source of all possible heresies and schismatic movements. Hence they do not allow any eloquence in theological studies, but only contentious disputations, and since they recognize as real theologians only those who know the *Parva logicalia*, they ignore all grammar and hence interpret declamations completely wrongly as formal statements formulating a certain doctrine, *in casu*, a heretical doctrine ('assertio').

(3) In several places Agrippa points out that the theologians either evaded the meaning of the denounced text, formulating a totally irrelevant objection, or pretended that he says something which in fact he does not. The Latin term is 'malitiosa dissimulatio' (fols. B iii^j, B v^v), 'impertinens et insufficiens allegatio' (fol. B iii^j^v), 'impudens/malitiosum mendacium' (fols. B iii^j^{r-v}), 'perverse accipere' (fol. B v^r), 'depravare verba mea et sensum' (fol. B v^v), 'malitiose argumentari', 'malitiose segregare,' and 'malitiose interpretari'; 'sycophantas esse' (fols. B vi^r, B vii^{r-v}), 'pervertere sententiam' (fol. B vii^r). The chapters in question are chapters 11, 12, 14, 18, 19, 23–26, 28, 32, 36–39, 41.

In chapter 19, for example, Agrippa responds to the objection that he calls Luther an 'invictus haereticus'.⁴³ Agrippa begins his answer by ironically inquiring about the reason for this objection: do the theologians begrudge Luther's title 'haereticus' because he shares this title with St. Paul (see Acts 24, 14), or do they take offence at the word 'invictus' because they, the Louvain theologians, assisted by their Cologne accomplices, were the first to condemn Luther? Agrippa then explains that it is not the purpose of the disputed passage to express his adhesion to Luther's theology, but that he simply states

⁴² The censors had referred to Augustine's *Contra Cresconium* and *De doctrina christiana* in order to substantiate their objection to Agrippa's thesis that the arts and sciences are detrimental to man's soul (fol. B iii^j^v). Agrippa discusses this objection in chapter 4 of the *Apologia* (fol. C viii^r).

⁴³ The name 'Luther' is erased from the Latin editions of *De incertitudine* from c. 1540 onward. It is one of the twenty-one passages, varying in length from a few words to a few sentences and treating, for the most part, theologians, friars, or the Roman Church generally, which are expunged from these editions; see for these editions Clément, *Bibliothèque curieuse historique et critique*, vol. 1, pp. 81–87; the twenty-one expunged passages are listed in note 88.

the fact that the heresy which Luther is disseminating has not been successfully suppressed. At this point he launches immediately into a counter-attack by observing that, in fact, Luther is gaining more terrain every day precisely because of the bad and counterproductive behavior of the Catholic authorities. For indeed, the more strongly Luther is condemned by worldly and ecclesiastical rulers, Agrippa observes, the more support he acquires. Agrippa then presents a brief historical survey of all the official actions taken against Luther, beginning with the statements against him made in learned debates by the theologians Prierias, Hoogstraten, Eck and the public sermons delivered first only in Latin but later also in German before the ordinary people by members of the religious orders, continuing with the counterproductive statements against Luther by the universities of Louvain, Cologne and Paris, and ending with the papal bull and the Imperial charter against Luther. Agrippa then stresses once more that he is merely stating facts, not formulating his agreement with Luther's doctrine, though he remarks with bitterness that Luther's teaching of Christ is spiritually and pastorally stronger than that of the professional theologians:

An hoc est vicisse Lutherum? De eventu loquor, non de dogmate, atque utinam non etiam religiosius praedicaretur Christus ab aliquibus haereticis, quam a magistris nostris. (*Apologia*, chapter 19, fol. E vi^o)

Does this [i.e. all the formal condemnations] imply a definitive victory over Luther? I am talking about the result, not about doctrine, and Heaven forbid that Christ were preached even more religiously by certain heretics than by our *magistri*.

Finally, the denunciation of the official Church as an inefficient oppressor of heresies is further developed by the mentioning of several heresies from the past and the present which the Church has never been able to suppress, namely Arrianism and Mohammedanism, and by an encomium of Luther in his role as a successful oppressor of the heresies of anabaptism and sacramentarianism in Germany. In this context, Agrippa refers to Luther as a 'useful poison':

Sed nolite irasci, probo non aliter quam serpentem in teriaca, qui quum ipse sit venenum, in hac etiam venenis est venenum. (*Apologia*, chapter 19, fol. E vii^r)

But do not become angry, I approve of him just as I approve of the snake in an antidote, which, while being poisonous itself, becomes a poison against poison in the antidote.⁴⁴

Agrippa finishes his attack with the warning that if the *magistri* do not start to combat Luther with real arguments instead of empty statements, the Christian world will be set completely aflame. Realizing that this warning could easily be interpreted by his opponent as an endorsement of Luther, Agrippa once more formulates a declaration of adherence to the Church of Rome:

verum ego me non Lutheranum, sed catholicum profiteor, nec in illorum gratiam, nec in istorum odium, neque ob quorumcunque metum fieri volo haereticus, et si cecidero in errorem aliquem, quod humanum est, pertinaciter perseverare non intendo, sed ita cecidisse me fatebor, ut sciam me honestissime surgere posse. (*Apologia*, chapter 19, fol. E vii^v)

But I profess to be not a Lutheran, but a Catholic, and I do not want to become a heretic, neither in order to please them [i.e. the Lutherans], nor out of hatred for them, nor because of fear for whomever it may be. However, if I fall into some kind of error, which is only human, I do not intend to persevere stubbornly in my mistake, but will admit that I have fallen in such a way that I am certain to be able to stand up in a most honest way.

Thus, this chapter constitutes not only an explanation of the fact that the words 'invictus haereticus' in *De incertitudine* do not imply an endorsement of Luther's doctrines, but also an unequivocal statement concerning Agrippa's position concerning Luther and Lutheranism in general. It is useful, for that matter, to mention here that in two other passages of *De incertitudine*, Agrippa had formulated outspoken criticism of the German Protestant movement. In chapter 6, on rhetoric, Agrippa pointed out that eloquence was often used by unscrupulous people for evil purposes, specially in the fields of politics, jurisprudence and religion. He observes that eloquence has often not been used to restore peace, concord and tranquillity, nor to preach charity, faith and religion, but rather that it has been the source of heresy, for

⁴⁴ See for the expression 'serpens in teriaca' Jerome, *Adversus Jovinianum*, II, 6: 'Denique carnes viperæ, unde theriaca conficimur, quantis rebus aptæ sint, norunt medici' [Finally, medical doctors know for how many things the flesh of the viper is useful, from which we make antidotes] (*Patrologia Latina*, vol. 23, 305).

nonnulli Scripturam sacram, eo quod eloquentia Ciceronianoque lepore careat, ita aspernantur, ut cum ethnicorum fucatis argumentorum persuasionibus contra catholicam interdum veritatem sentirent. (*De incertitudine*, ed. 1531, fol. 26^{r-v}; *Opera*, p. 32)

some men despise Holy Scripture, since it lacks eloquence and Ciceronian wit, to such an extent that they nourish deceitful convictions resulting from pagan arguments and feelings that sometimes go against Catholic truth.

He mentions some examples of ancient heresies, but then focuses on the leaders of the modern heresies:

Qui sunt duces Germanicarum haeresum, quae ab uno Luthero suscepto exordio hodie tam multae sunt, ut fere singulae civitates suam peculiarem habeant haeresim? Nonne auctores illorum homines disertissimi, linguae eloquentia et calami elegantia instructi? etc. (*De incertitudine*, ed. 1531, fol. 26^v; *Opera*, p. 32)

Who are the leaders of the German heresies, which, after the beginning had been inaugurated by Luther, are so numerous today that practically every single city has its own heresy? Are not the authors of those heresies the most eloquent of men and trained in elegant writing?

The second passage occurs at the end of chapter 57, dealing with images. In this chapter, Agrippa condemns the various forms of superstition related to images, such as the excessive worship of relics. He then observes that the opposite of that fault, namely the excessive disrespect of relics, has also led to the adoption of heretical positions, and here he mentions the participants of the German Protestant movement:

Atque hic vos scire volo, quod, quemadmodum imaginum exuperans cultus, idolatria est, ita illarum pertinax detestatio, haeresis est, de qua olim Philippus et Leo tertius Imperatores damnati sunt. Sic etiam quemadmodum reliquiarum abusus execrabile scelus est, ita earundem irreverentia, detestanda haeresis est: quae quondam a Vigilantio Gallo progenita, ab Hieronymo profligata, nunc rursus una cum imaginum expugnatoribus a proximis annis apud Germanos repullulascere coepit. (*De incertitudine*, ed. 1531, fol. 74^v–75^r; *Opera*, pp. 136–137).

And here I want you to know that as the extreme reverence of images is idolatry, so is their persistent execration a heresy, of which the Emperors Philip and Leo III were once convicted. Likewise, as the

misuse of relics is a detestable and wicked action, so their disrespect is an abominable heresy. This heresy occurred originally in the French author Vigilantius and was conquered by St. Jerome. Nowadays, together with the iconoclasts, it has in recent years begun to grow again in Germany.

(4) In a few places Agrippa observes that the censors completely lack all sense of humor, and are unable to take anything lightheartedly. The Latin term to point to this characteristic is 'morositas' (fols. B v^{r-v}; B viii^r). This argument is developed in chapters 20, 27 and 43. Chapter 27, in which Agrippa tells a comic anecdote, provides an example. This satiric passage is one of the few passages in *De incertitudine* in which Agrippa uses a lighthearted rather than a severely censorious tone to make his point.

Among the propositions which the theologians condemned figures the statement in chapter 25 of *De incertitudine*, that the devil was the inventor of the monk's hood ('Diabolus est author cucullae' [The devil is the inventor of the monk's hood. *Apologia*, fol. B v^r]). This statement is part of what Agrippa calls a funny story ('fabella et iocum'), and he thinks that the opponent's arrogant fretfulness ('superciliosa morositas') has led him to take this joke as a calumny.⁴⁵ What was this funny story all about? Chapter 25 of *De incertitudine* deals with sculpture. In order to illustrate that these arts enjoy great authority, Agrippa relates an anecdote which he recalled from the time when he was living in Italy. At one time, Augustinian friars and canons regular quarreled over whether the Augustinians originally wore a dark outer garment on a white tunic or vice versa. An official committee was formed at the papal court to investigate the matter. Since Scripture could not elucidate this problem, the Roman judges resorted to paintings and other visual representations and ruled that the oldest representation of the Augustinians' dress would be decisive. Agrippa wants to ridicule the importance which the papal Curia conferred on this relatively minor question and the way it was solved. He therefore goes on by saying that he followed the example offered by the papal committee in order to research a problem which had interested him for some time, namely the origin of the monk's hood. After he had established that Scripture yields no relevant information, he had examined mural paintings presenting scenes from

⁴⁵ Agrippa's marginal comment to the theologians' accusation: 'Superciliosa morositate fabellam et iocum trahunt in calumniam' (*Apologia*, fol. B v^r).

the Old and New Testaments in the entrance halls and arcades of monasteries, and found that the devil who tempted Jesus in the desert was dressed in a monk's hood. Thus, he established that the monk's hood was an invention of the devil (*De incertitudine*, ed. 1531, fols. 38^v–39^r; *Opera*, pp. 59–60).

In chapter 27 of the *Apologia* Agrippa comments extensively on the theologians' objection to this passage. As is usual in the *Apologia*, Agrippa's self-defense takes the form of a powerful counter-attack. On the one hand, he compares his story on the monk's hood with the novellas of Boccaccio and the light stories of Poggio, and ridicules the theologians for judging such literary stories with the strict criteria that apply to serious theological writing. Here, Agrippa uses words similar to those used in his definitions of the declamation, which we shall analyze in the next chapter:

Quis non rideret magistros nostros, si ad theologicum rigorem excutere velint novellas Bocatii et facetias Poggii? (*Apologia*, chapter 27, fol. G ij^r)

Who would not laugh at our *magistri* if they wished to judge the stories of Boccaccio and the *Facetiae* of Poggio by strict theological standards?

He adds that one might argue from a standpoint of bigotry that the topic of the monk's hood does not lend itself to jokes, but excludes this as a valid argument for debate by pointing out in a mocking way that there is no article of faith which forbids such jokes ('fateor me ignorasse hunc articulum fidei' [I admit that I did not know this article of faith]). This point, in fact, is a satirical remark that hits its mark powerfully, because the absurd judgment suggested by Agrippa was exactly the judgment which the Paris theologian Clichtove had formulated in his attack on Erasmus's *Encomium matrimonii*. Clichtove compared, in his *Propugnaculum ecclesiae* of 1526, Erasmus's declamation with the *Facetiae* of Poggio, the *De voluptate* of Valla and recent writings which were considered to be obscene and unchristian and therefore to be suppressed.⁴⁶ In the *Dilutio*, Erasmus had already pointed out with sarcasm that this comparison was completely inapplicable (Erasmus's discussion appropriately began with the indignant exclamation 'Sobriusne eras Clithovee, quum ista scriberes?' [Were you sane,

⁴⁶ J. Clichtove, *Propugnaculum ecclesiae adversus Lutheranos*, fol. 127^r. The passage is quoted and commented on by Erasmus, *Dilutio*, ed. Telle, pp. 95–96. See also Massaut, *Josse Clichtove*, vol. 2, p. 189 and note 228.

Clichtove, when you wrote that?]).⁴⁷ Agrippa, who knew the *Dilutio*, is building here on this mocking element in Erasmus's argument.

On the other hand, Agrippa discusses the objection also from a serious point of view by stressing that within a theological debate, jokes should not necessarily be the object of formal condemnation. He argues this point as he always does, namely by supporting his claim with authoritative statements, in this case a passage from Augustine, as quoted in the *Decretum Gratiani*,⁴⁸ adding that no Biblical testimonies can be cited which support the opposite viewpoint. The concluding remark brings the discussion back at the playful level where it began, when Agrippa observes that monks are in constant dispute over their way of dressing, and that this 'cucullomachia' [fight over monks' hoods] in fact proves the truth of Agrippa's joke, because the devil is the initiator of all conflict (*Apologia*, fols. Gij^r–Gijj^r).

⁴⁷ *Dilutio*, ed. Telle, p. 96.

⁴⁸ 'Si non serio, sed ioco dicantur, non deputantur mendacia, neque piarum aurium offensiva' [If things are not said in earnestness, but in jest, they must be not counted as lies or as things which are offensive to pious ears] (*Apologia*, chapter 27, fol. G ij^r). The source reference is Augustine, *Super Genesim*, c. 45, as quoted in C. 22 q. 2 c. 18 ('Non deputantur mendacia, cum ea, que non sunt, ioco dicuntur').

CHAPTER FIVE

AGRIPPA'S DEFINITION OF THE HUMANIST DECLAMATION AND ITS ERASMIAN ANTECEDENT

'Nosti enim, quid sit declamatio'

Agrippa to Erasmus on December 20, 1531

1. *Introduction*

We now come to an essential part of our investigation, namely Agrippa's definition of the character and function of the declamation. As indicated in chapter 4 above (p. 142), Agrippa, in his discussion of the genre of the humanist declamation in chapters 1, 3 and 42 of the *Apologia*, lays claim to immunity from the theologians' accusations on account of the rhetorical character of declamations. These passages deserve to be looked at carefully for two different reasons.

(1) Because the statements occur in the 1533 edition, which, as was argued in chapter 4 above (pp. 121 ff.), constitutes a defense not only of *De incertitudine*, but also of humanistic theology, Agrippa's observations on the declamation express what he considers to be the essence of humanist theology. Moreover, his use of Erasmus's authority in his explanations on the genre of declamation confirm his effort to present himself as the spokesman of the humanists. On the whole, a proper understanding of the observations on the genre of the declamation helps to understand Agrippa's status as a humanist theologian.

(2) As briefly discussed in our Introduction, Agrippa has had for centuries the reputation of being a charlatan rather than a serious theologian. This reputation implies that his declamations were not interpreted along the lines suggested by Agrippa in the *Apologia*, but rather as literary paradoxes without serious content. In modern scholarship, Agrippa's observations on the character and function of the declamation have been used to underpin the traditional view that Agrippa's declamations are literary paradoxes, and hence to confirm

his legendary reputation as a charlatan. Therefore, a proper understanding of these observations is necessary if we are to reach a more historical understanding of Agrippa.

Let us examine in more detail these two points, before we turn to the analysis of Agrippa's observations.

2. *Agrippa and the declamations of Erasmus*

De incertitudine is not Agrippa's only writing belonging to the genre of 'declamation.' Three other theological treatises among Agrippa's writings belong to the same genre, namely *De nobilitate et praecellentia foeminei sexus* (1509), *De originali peccato* (1518) and *De sacramento matrimonii* (1526). It is important to try to fathom why Agrippa chose to use the classification 'declamation,' because none of his declamations is actually a declamation in the classical meaning of the term, that is, a model speech (or letter) in the judicial or deliberative genre (*controversia, suatoria*). Agrippa never explained why he used this classification, but the following suggestions can be made to clarify this question.

First, the four declamations form a coherent group of texts within the body of his theological writings, in that they are all learned discourses in which he is trying to convince the reader to accept his opinion concerning the subject at hand. In chapter 3 above (pp. 102–115) we reviewed the particular rhetorical strategies, straightforward and few as they are, which Agrippa developed to this end. The declamations are thus distinguished from Agrippa's academic speeches (specially the lecture on Neoplatonic love and the Pavia lecture), his (fragmentary) dialogue *De homine*, in which Agrippa himself appears in conversation with his pupil Christophorus Schyelling, and the texts which constitute the reproduction of informal talks for a small audience of friends (the *Sermones*).

Secondly, it is significant that Agrippa used the term 'declamation' to classify his treatises only from 1518 onward, that is, after his definitive return to the North following his seven-year stay in Italy. *De originali peccato*, *De sacramento matrimonii* and *De incertitudine* were all written after the return from Italy; *De nobilitate et praecellentia foeminei sexus* was not called a declamation at the time it was written, but this classification was added upon its publication in the *Collected Treatises* some twenty years later. The importance of the year 1518 is suggested by the correspondence, which shows that from the moment of

his return to the North, Agrippa was constantly engaged in discussion of those religious questions which were dividing ever more implacably theologians advocating reform within the Church and those opposed to it, that is, the humanists and their opponents. In these discussions, Agrippa always took the side of the humanists, as we have seen, in other words, the side of those who were striving for reform in the Christian commonwealth. One of the most important scholars determining the direction in which intellectuals seeking reform of the Church of Rome would develop, was Erasmus, for whose theological work Agrippa had great admiration.¹

Erasmus's name and the titles of his theological writings occur in Agrippa's correspondence from the year 1518 onward. They appear in letters which illustrate Agrippa's overall interest in theology and Church affairs. During his stay in Metz, at the time of his conflict with the Dominican Salin, for instance, Agrippa exchanged with his friend Deodatus books of Lefèvre d'Étaples and Erasmus (*Epistolae*, 2, 24, n.d., p. 672). In two letters exchanged with Cantiuncula, in May and June 1519, the *Ratio verae theologiae* and the Annotations on the New Testament are mentioned.² In another letter of the same period, Agrippa thanked Cantiuncula for sending him a copy of the *Apologia contra Latomi dialogum* (*Epistolae*, 2, 37, n.d., p. 684). Other letters show that Agrippa and his correspondents exchanged views about Erasmus's current standpoint on Church affairs and information about new books by Erasmus.³ On April 4, 1532, in the middle of Agrippa's quarrel with the Louvain theologians, a friend sent to Agrippa a volume referred to as *Responsiones Erasmi ad censuras theologorum Parisiensium*.⁴ This title presumably refers to the *Declarationes ad censuras Lutetiae*

¹ In the *Defensio*, Agrippa criticizes Salin for attacking Erasmus, 'cuius hodie in Christiana ecclesia in sacris literis doctiorem paremve non habet alterum' [who, in the Christian Church of today, is second to none among the learned in sacred letters] (*De beatissimae Annae monogamia*, fol. K iiij^r).

² *Epistolae*, 2, 32–33, d.d. 23 May and 2 June 1519, pp. 680–681. See also the letters mentioned in note 3 below.

³ *Epistolae*, 2, 41, d.d. 25 October 1519, p. 692 (Cantiuncula announces from Basel the forthcoming publication by Froben of a *Farrago epistolarum Erasmi*); *Epistolae*, 3, 7, d.d. 26 June 1521, p. 724 (Deodatus inquires whether the second edition of Erasmus's Annotations to the New Testament has come out); *Epistolae*, 3, 30, d.d. 9 October 1522, pp. 739–740 (A correspondent asks if Agrippa has any books by Erasmus or Luther to show him); *Epistolae*, 3, 35, d.d. 'Vigilia regum' 1523, p. 745 (Agrippa asks Cantiuncula about Erasmus's feelings about Luther); *Epistolae*, 3, 45, d.d. 12 September 1524, pp. 752–753 (Cantiuncula sends Agrippa several books, among which the *Spongia Erasmi adversus Huttenum*).

⁴ *Epistolae*, 7, 9, p. 1004.

vulgatas sub nomine Facultatis Theologiae Parisiensis, published early in 1532 at Basel,⁵ which contain, among other things, the *Dilutio* [refutation] of Josse Clichtove's objections to Erasmus's *Encomium matrimonii*.

It was undoubtedly Erasmus's declamations, specially the *Praise of Folly* (*Encomium moriae declamatio*) of 1511 and the *Declamation on the Praise of Marriage*, commonly known as *Encomium matrimonii*, of 1518 (and its reprint in *De conscribendis epistolis* of 1522), which prompted Agrippa to use the classification 'declamation' for some of his own theological treatises. Several indications in the *Apologia* and *Querela* support this hypothesis.

First, Agrippa suggests in the *Querela* that the Louvain theologians had attacked *De incertitudine* in order to gain revenge for the criticism which Erasmus had formulated against the professional theologians in his *Praise of Folly*.⁶ Since nothing in the *Articuli* warrants the conclusion that the Louvain theologians actually made the connection between the *Praise of Folly* and *De incertitudine*, it seems possible that it was Agrippa himself who wished, from the start, to have the two declamations seen on a par with one another.

Secondly, and far more importantly, Agrippa includes in his own explanations concerning the nature and function of the declamation some unmistakable references to several statements which Erasmus made concerning the same topic in the apologies which he wrote to defend the orthodoxy of the *Encomium matrimonii* against the attacks of two particular theologians, one from Louvain and one from the Sorbonne. The long polemic surrounding the *Encomium matrimonii* was a *cause célèbre* at the time. In 1518, Erasmus published, as part of a small collection of declamations, a model letter in recommendation of marriage which he had written at the end of the 1490s, when he was giving private lessons in rhetoric.⁷ This letter, commonly called *Encomium matrimonii*, constitutes, together with the outline of a model letter against marriage, a set of *suasoriae* pro and con marriage, after

⁵ See Allen, no. 2579, vol. 9, p. 397, note at line 57. There is also an Antwerp edition of April 1532 and a second edition printed at Basel in September 1532.

⁶ *Querela*, fols. L i^v–L ii^r.

⁷ See for this edition *Bibliotheca Belgica*, vol. 2 (1964), pp. 767–768. In the dedicatory letter, Erasmus writes that he had recently recovered among his papers the letter in favor of marriage (Allen, no. 604). The letter is also included in *De conscribendis epistolis* (first, unauthorized, edition, 1521; first authorized edition, 1522). A modern edition of the letter is available both as part of *De conscribendis epistolis* (ASD I, 2, ed. J.-Cl. Margolin, pp. 401 ff.) and as a separate writing (ASD I, 5, ed. J.-Cl. Margolin, pp. 385 ff.).

the example of the ancient declamations in deliberative rhetoric. In the *Encomium matrimonii*, Erasmus starts from the hypothetical case of a young man who does not wish to get married, and develops the argument that for the young man in question, given his psychological make-up and his material circumstances as presented in the fictional case, it is morally better and moreover more useful to change his mind and decide to get married. When the *Encomium matrimonii* was published in 1518, its rhetorical focus was misunderstood by some theologians. They believed that it contained a general praise of marriage to the detriment of clerical celibacy, and thus took it as a hidden attack by Erasmus against clerical celibacy and monasticism. The Louvain theologian Jean Briart of Ath gave voice to these feelings when, in a speech delivered at a degree granting ceremony, he accused the author of the *Encomium matrimonii* of heresy. When Erasmus discussed the matter with Briart in a private interview, Erasmus reported some years later, it appeared that Briart believed that a declamation was the same thing as a holy sermon, that is, a general exhortation to practice virtue or to avoid vice, not advice to a specific person concerning a concrete question.⁸ Erasmus also dealt with this misunderstanding in writing, namely in the *Apologia pro declamatione matrimonii*, completed on March 1, 1519.⁹ In 1526, the Paris theologian Josse Clichtove denounced Erasmus's *Declamation on the Praise of Marriage* as a work favoring Lutheranism, and attacked the 1519 *Apologia*. Like Briart, Clichtove argued that the *Declamation on the Praise of Marriage* contained a general exhortation of marriage, and hence an implicit condemnation of clerical celibacy.¹⁰ Erasmus refuted Clichtove's arguments in a short piece written and published on the spur

⁸ See Erasmus, *Apologia adversus debacchationes Sutoris* (1525), LB IX, 770 B: Idem accidit mihi cum Joanne Atensi quondam Lovanii. Multa fortiter dixerat in me publicitus, in frequentissimo conventu scholasticorum, non abstinens interim a mentione haereseos. Deinde cum expostularem privatim cum illo, deprehendi causam erroris. Existimabat declamationem sonare Latinis concionem Ecclesiasticam (. . .) [The same thing happened to me one day in Louvain with Joannes Atensis. He had spoken strongly against me in public, at a very crowded meeting of scholars, which did not stop him from referring to heresy. Then, when I demanded a private interview with him, I discovered the cause of his mistake. He believed that 'declamation' is the Latin word for holy sermon (. . .)]. Agrippa also knew this passage, and referred to it in his *Apologia*, chapter 1, fol. C ij^r.

⁹ Erasmus inserted the *Apologia* in a theological writing then in press, the *Paraphrasis ad Corinthios*; see Allen, letter 916, introduction (vol. 3, p. 480); text in LB IX, 105 F–112 A.

¹⁰ Clichtove, *Propugnaculum ecclesiae adversus Lutheranos*, chapters 31–33 (against the *Encomium matrimonii*) and 34 (against the 1519 *Apologia*), fols. 119^v–129^r. 'Jodocus ita

of the moment in 1526.¹¹ A more detailed writing against the accusations of Clichtove was published by Erasmus in 1532.¹² In these apologies, Erasmus clarifies the essence of the declamation and explains how he uses it to further the cause of Christianity in a manner in which it had been endorsed by the theologians. The three apologies were well known among contemporary readers. Hence, the quotations and reminiscences in Agrippa's polemic against the Louvain theologians, which we shall discuss in detail below, were most likely immediately recognized as an expression of his endorsement of Erasmus's humanistic approach of theology. Thus, it is safe to assume that Agrippa included the references to Erasmus's texts with the explicit purpose of enhancing the value of his own apologies as humanistic manifestos.

It is necessary to emphasize that if Agrippa used for his own purpose relevant passages on the character and function of the declamation from Erasmus's apologies, Erasmus was certainly not delighted to find out, when a copy of the volume containing the *Apologia* and *Querela* was delivered to him in December 1533, that the author of the two polemical writings had acknowledged his indebtedness to him so openly.¹³ Erasmus believed that Agrippa had been far too provocative toward the conservative churchmen and therefore, he suspected, counter-productive in the furtherance of *bonae literae*. Erasmus had already expressed this fear to a friend in August 1531, that is, before he had read *De incertitudine* and even before he had been in touch with Agrippa:

De Cornelio Agrippa quidam amici docti ad me scripserunt e Brabantia, sed sic ut nec hominis violentiam probare et plus illi in colligendo studii quam in deligendo iudicii tribuere videantur. Nonnullis illud non ingratum est, quod theologis ac monachis hactenus feliciter oppedit, idque Caesaris umbra, cui se profitetur a consiliis, et Cardinalis Campegii praesidio. Sed vereor ne hominis fortitudo bonas literas magna

citat mea, quasi ego Theologus agens serio suaserim illa populo Christiano' [Josse cites my words as if I, acting as a theologian, were solemnly exhorting the Christian people] (*Appendix de scriptis Jodoci Clithovei*, LB IX, 813 A).

¹¹ The *Appendix de scriptis Jodoci Clithovei*, published in the *Prologus in supputationem calumniarum Bedae*, Basle 1526; see Allen, letter 1780, note at line 38 (vol. 6, p. 454); text in LB IX, 811 F–814 D.

¹² *Dilutio eorum quae Iodocus Clithoveus scripsit adversus declamationem Des. Erasmi Roterdami suasoriam matrimonii*, Antwerp and Basel, 1532. Modern edition by E. Telle, Paris, 1968.

¹³ Allen, no. 2894, p. 342.

gravet invidia, si modo vera sunt quae narrant amicorum literae. Librum illius nondum videre contigit, nec ad me scripsit unquam.¹⁴ (Allen, no. 2529, p. 333)

Several learned friends have written to me from Brabant about Cornelius Agrippa. They do not seem to approve of the man's vehemence, and seem to attribute to him more erudition in accumulating materials than judgment in selecting them. Some are not unhappy with the fact that he has so far successfully mocked the theologians and monks, and that he did this under the protection of the Emperor, whose secretary he claims to be, and with the support of Cardinal Campeggi. But I am afraid that, if the things which my friends' letters say are true, the bravura of the man will burden the *bonae literae* with much hatred. I have not yet had the chance to take a look at his book, and he has never written to me.

In 1533, when Agrippa informed Erasmus about his conflict with the Louvain theologians, Erasmus advised him, not knowing that the *Apologia* and *Querela* had already been written, to disentangle himself from his conflict with the theologians; he showed Agrippa the risks by recalling the case of Louis de Berquin, who had been burned as a heretic in 1529.¹⁵ Erasmus's repugnance to controversy must explain why the correspondence between the two men was limited to only nine short letters, to Agrippa's disappointment. In his last letter, written in April 1533, Agrippa could hardly suppress his disillusionment with the fact that Erasmus had not yet fulfilled his promise to write a longer and more substantial letter about *De incertitudine*, as he had promised to do in his first letter to Agrippa.¹⁶ Erasmus's reply, which is also his last letter to Agrippa, contains a brief remark of appreciation for *De incertitudine* and the aforementioned advice not to engage in a polemic with the theologians (and, above all, not to involve Erasmus in it).¹⁷

In short, Erasmus's attitude toward Agrippa resembles that of

¹⁴ Erasmus in fact knew Agrippa by reputation since much earlier, for in November 1523, he spoke highly of his talents during a dinner conversation at which several of Agrippa's friends were present, among others the lawyer Cantiuncula. A servant of Erasmus, who was also a member of the circle of friends and researchers surrounding Agrippa, wrote Agrippa about this dinner conversation. See *Epistolae*, 3, 44, d.d. 10 November (1523), pp. 751–752.

¹⁵ *Epistolae*, 7, 40, d.d. 21 April 1533 p. 1066; Allen, no. 2796.

¹⁶ *Epistolae*, 7, 38, d.d. 10 April 1533, p. 1064; Allen, no. 2790.

¹⁷ *Epistolae*, 7, 40, d.d. 21 April 1533, p. 1066; Allen, no. 2796. See also chapter 4 above, p. 118.

Lefèvre d'Étaples, who advised Agrippa in 1519 not to begin a public debate with his Dominican opponent about the matter of the triple marriage of Saint Anne, since in the given circumstances it could only lead to a useless quarrel. This disagreement concerning the best strategy to refute the opponents of humanist theology reveals a significant difference in attitude between Lefèvre and Erasmus on the one hand, and Agrippa on the other.

3. *Agrippa's reputation as a sophist from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century*

Before we turn to Agrippa's statements concerning the genre of the declamation in Agrippa's *Apologia*, it is useful to argue why such a detailed analysis is required. To this end, we must return to Agrippa's legendary reputation as a charlatan. In our Introduction, we briefly examined how Agrippa acquired the reputation of an evil magician and a heretic. Here, we shall briefly explore how his declamations, specially *De incertitudine* and *De nobilitate et praecellentia foeminei sexus*, came to be seen as literary paradoxes written without serious purpose.

The French satiric author Jacques Tahureau (1527–1555) was probably the first author after Agrippa's death to write explicitly that Agrippa had deceitful intentions when he wrote *De incertitudine*. The relevant passage in question occurs in a section of Tahureau's *Dialogues* (written between 1550 and 1555), devoted to the art of mockery. Cosmophile, the disciple, asks Le Democritic, who is the master voicing Tahureau's own views, to teach him the art of mockery. Le Democritic then distinguishes three kinds of frivolous speech ('sotte moquerie'). The first two kinds, 'moquerie niaise' and 'moquerie affectee' are the domain of dull and pretentious people who pointlessly ridicule the things they do not understand. The third kind, 'moquerie feinte et dissimulee,' is usually practised by intelligent individuals. Since these people do understand what they are talking about, their mocking is excusable. Tahureau places Agrippa's *De incertitudine* in this third category. However, Tahureau feels that Agrippa did in fact not have the competence to be a good mocker:

car il est tout certain, quoi qu'en ait escrit Agrippe, que neantmoins il en avoit le plus souvent toute autre et contraire opinion qu'il n'ecriroit, ainsi mesme que par ces autres oeuvres il appert assez evidentment. D'avantage, icelui Agrippe en ses moqueries a plus usé d'autorités

empruntees, et de je ne sçai quels petis arguments cornus et falacieus, propres seulement pour seduire et faire changer d'opinion au simple vulgaire, qu'il n'a pas fait d'une ferme et assuree raison. (*Les dialogues Non moins profitables que facetieux*, ed. Gauna, p. 201)

For it is certain, no matter what Agrippa wrote about this, that he mostly held the opposite opinion from what he wrote, as becomes clear from his other writings. Moreover, this man Agrippa has had, in his mockeries, greater recourse to statements from authoritative writers and used more petty and fallacious arguments, appropriate only to charm and influence the opinion of the common people, than he has had recourse to firm and secure reasoning.

When Cosmophile asks if Agrippa is not reputable for his erudition and whether it is not a sign of great oratorical skill to be able to endorse antithetical arguments concerning a given topic, Le Democritic replies negatively: if something is good, it cannot be bad at the same time, no matter what orators with their sweet talk contend. As for Agrippa's learning, le Democritic concedes that Agrippa knew many things, yet he stresses—thus voicing the prejudice imposed by the Church, and which would continue to exist during the next centuries—that he was scoffing at Christians:

Il est donq' tout assuré qu' Agrippa n'estoit qu'un vrai pipeur de chre-tiens. (*Les dialogues Non moins profitables que facetieux*, ed. Gauna, p. 203)

It is thus certain that Agrippa was nothing but a real deceiver of Christians.

Tahureau's remarks constitute a shift in the negative assessment of *De incertitudine*, which proved, in the long run, to be even more detrimental to an unbiased and balanced assessment of *De incertitudine* than the allegations of heresy formulated by the Louvain censors. For indeed, Tahureau does not *argue*, as the Louvain censors had, that Agrippa challenged in an unacceptable way the current teaching of the Church (however unjustifiable their arguments were, as Agrippa was to show in the *Apologia*), but he simply *claims* that Agrippa had an insincere intellectual attitude. Tahureau thus intends to cast the kind of vague doubt on Agrippa's personal and intellectual integrity which all too easily slips into uncritical and eventually persistent prejudice—the sort which, to a certain extent, continues to influence much of current scholarship on Agrippa's writings.

Several contemporaries of Tahureau shared the French satirist's

judgment of Agrippa. Thus, the reformed theologian Victorinus Strigelius (1524–1569) wrote in his *Loci theologici* that all learned men believe Agrippa to have used the sophistical method in *De incertitudine* in order to write only ridiculous, detestable and foolish things.¹⁸ Jean Calvin (1509–1564) mentioned Agrippa by name in his treatise *Des scandales* (1550), in the section on men who offended Scripture by claiming that the New Testament is a source of discord. (Agrippa makes this claim in *De incertitudine*.) In this section, Calvin mentions Agrippa as an example of the heretic whose contempt for the Bible has been punished with insanity and eternal damnation.¹⁹ Calvin is referring here to the popular story recorded by Paulus Jovius, according to which Agrippa had died a gruesome death.

Toward the end of the sixteenth century, almost fifty years after Agrippa's death, the French translation of *De incertitudine* by the Huguenot Louis Turquet de Mayerne turned Agrippa's challenging and hortatory argument into a literary set piece intended, as is indicated on the title page of the translation, to be read in court circles as an exercise in ingenious reasoning against common opinion on any topic.²⁰ In Turquet's translation, all passages which might be felt to be theologically or politically controversial for the French Protestant audience were removed from the text. Turquet indeed translated a complete, unexpunged Latin edition of *De incertitudine* (that is, a text which included the passages expunged by the Catholic Church), but

¹⁸ The passage is cited in German translation by Arnold, *Unparteyische Kirchen- und Ketzerhistorie, vom Anfang des Neuen Testaments bis auf das Jahr Christi 1688*, vol. 2, book XVI, cap. 22, par. 20: 'Dass er (i.e. Agrippa) auff sophistische art aus allem etwas heraus gesucht, was etwa lächerlich, verhasst und kindisch ist. Das übrige aber vertuscht und verschwiegen habe' [(Strigelius says) that Agrippa always chose, in a sophistical manner, ridiculous, detestable and childish things, while concealing and hushing up everything else] (p. 788).

¹⁹ *De scandalis*, ed. 1550, p. 54; *Des scandales*, ed. critique O. Fatio, pp. 136–137. Along with Agrippa, Calvin mentions Etienne Dolet (1509–1546), who was hanged as a heretic, and a certain Villeneuve, who is either Michel Servet or Simon de Neufville, Dolet's teacher in rhetoric. See for this problem Fatio's note 246. Dolet defended Simon de Neufville against unspecified calumnies in his 1534 *Oratio secunda in Tholosam* (ed. K. Lloyd-Jones—M. van der Poel, pp. 39–40 of the Latin text).

²⁰ *Declamation* (changed into *Paradoxe* from the second edition onward) *sur l'incertitude, vanité et abus des sciences* (. . .) *Oeuvre qui peut profiter, & qui apporte merueilleux contentement à ceux qui frequentent les Cours des grands Seigneurs, & qui veulent apprendre à discourir d'une infinité de choses contre la commune opinion*. ['Declamation (changed into *Paradox* from the second edition onward) on the uncertainty, vanity and misuse of the sciences. A work which can be profitable and which will bring satisfaction to those who frequent the noble courts, and who wish to learn to reason on any subject against common opinion.']

he erased on his own account several passages which contain criticism of the Protestants; in the margin of the text Turquet moreover placed at several places derogatory remarks casting doubt on Agrippa's sincerity. In the process of Turquet's translation and recreation of Agrippa's text, the function of the paradox such as Agrippa had intended it, underwent a *volte face*. For indeed, if Agrippa used the paradox as a stylistic means to draw maximum attention to an important religious lesson and to criticize as forcefully as possible his contemporaries for neglecting their faith (as we saw in chapter 3 above), in Turquet's version of *De incertitudine*, the paradox is an independent literary genre serving to confirm in an entertaining way the commonly held social opinion that arts and sciences do, in fact, lead to certain knowledge and do have real worth.²¹

To be more precise, Turquet's transformed version of *De incertitudine* belongs to the genre of the *ioco-seria*, that is, literary texts in prose or poetry written for the sake of entertainment, in which the author praises worthless or bad things, either to show his ingenuity or to parody generally held opinions, with or without the purpose of teaching in a pleasant form a conventional moral lesson (e.g. drunkenness is bad). During the late sixteenth century and in the following centuries, this genre was extremely popular. Numerous paradoxes were written and large collections with paradoxes were published, the most famous of which is Caspar Dornavius's *Amphitheatrum sapientiae socraticae joco-seriae* (1619).²² Dornavius himself wrote a praise of the scarab, the lily, the oak, a fruit-tree, and the marriage wreath.²³ In Dornavius's collection, chapter 102 of *De incertitudine* ('Ad encomium asini digressio') figures, in the category 'Praises of Animals,' as one of a number of heterogeneous texts in verse and prose in praise of the ass (vol. 1,

²¹ See for a more detailed analysis of this aspect of Turquet's translation Van der Poel, 'The French Translation of Agrippa von Nettesheim's *Declamatio de incertitudine et vanitate scientiarum et artium: Declamatio* as Paradox.' In Agrippa's time, the word paradox was used only in the sense current in the Middle Ages, denoting profound thoughts or things rationally incomprehensible in the fields of philosophy and theology; for a discussion of this use, see Van der Poel, 'Paradoxon et adoxon chez Ménandre le Rhéteur et chez les humanistes du début du XVI^e siècle. A propos du *De incertitudine et vanitate scientiarum* d' Agrippa de Nettesheim.'

²² *Amphitheatrum sapientiae Socraticae joco-seriae*, 2 vols., Hanau, 1619. Other well-known collections are *Elegantiores praestantium virorum satyrae*, Leiden, 1655; *Dissertationum ludicarum et amoenitatum ... varii*, Leiden, 1638 (1644); *Admiranda rerum admirabilium ...*, Nijmegen, 1666 (1676).

²³ Vol. 1, pp. 126, 196, 205, 213 and 667.

pp. 493–503). Among these texts figure a prose and verse translation of the essay on the ass in Ortensio Landi's *Sermoni funebri de vari auctori nella morte de diversi animali* (1548),²⁴ an inaugural lecture to a course on Plautus's (c. 251–184 BCE) *Asinaria* by the Collège de France professor of rhetoric and Latin poetry Jean Passerat (1534–1602) and some topical poems by Claudian (fourth century CE), Melanchthon (1497–1560), the poets laureate Johann Lauterbach (1531–1593) and Johann Stigel (1515–1562), Johann Maior (1533–1600), Friedrich Widebram (1533–1585) and Johann Vulteius (d. 1600). The theological and moral implications of Agrippa's text were obviously lost beyond recuperation after it was included among these literary set pieces.

Seventeenth- and eighteenth-century translations of *De incertitudine* and of *De nobilitate et praecellentia foeminei sexus* confirm the impression that Agrippa's declamations were considered at that time to be literary set pieces rather than serious discourses on theological questions. An analysis of extant, often anonymous, translations, is impossible in the present context, but the following remarks on three translations will suffice to illustrate the point. The title of the first edition of Oudaan's Dutch translation of *De incertitudine* (1651) closely resembles the title of Turquet's translation and it is therefore likely that the readers of the translation were not supposed to take the writing as a serious theological argument.²⁵ In the foreword to a French translation of *De nobilitate et praecellentia foeminei sexus*, Agrippa's treatise is compared with paradoxes such as Apuleius's *Praise of the Ass*, Erasmus's *Praise of Folly*, and Balzac's *Praise of the Quartan Fever*. The foreword also mentions that in this translation, some controversial passages from the Latin original were expunged, while a few passages were added and the wording of the original was occasionally adapted, so as to make the text more appealing to the audience. In 1721, this translation, including the foreword, was in its turn put into German.²⁶ This Ger-

²⁴ The author of the prose translation is Willem Canter (1542–1575); the adaptation in verse is by Jacob van den Eynde (1575–1614).

²⁵ *Van de onzeekerheyd ende ydelheyd der wetenschappen en konsten. Leerende met goet en vast bewijs redeneeren tegen 't gemeen gevoelen in menigderleye zaken*, Haarlem, 1650 (Royal Library, The Hague, 3086 G 4).

²⁶ *Anmuthiges und curieuses Tractätgen von dem Vorzug des weiblichen vor dem männlichen Geschlecht, ehelmals aus dem Lateinischen ins Frantzöische, anietzo aus dem Frantzöischen ins Teutsche übersetzt von I.K.L., s.l., 1721* (Royal Library, The Hague, 2201 D 29). I have consulted the foreword of the French translator only in the German version (fols. A 2^r–A3^v).

man version was then coupled with the *altera pars*, in which the excellence of the male sex is argued.²⁷ Likewise, the eighteenth-century Dutch translator compared *De nobilitate et praecellentia foeminei sexus* with literary paradoxes (he likens it, for example, with Daniel Heinsius's *Praise of the Ass*), and he stresses, to protect himself, that no theological implications should be drawn from the translation. The translator adds to this remark the general observation that Agrippa had controversial ideas and that he was a heretic of the Reformed Church.²⁸

Agrippa's reputation as a sophistic writer of literary paradoxes which were not to be taken seriously was confirmed in scholarly writings of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and in the more popular writings, destined for a larger audience, which borrowed material from scholarly writings. For instance, J.P. Nicéron quoted in the seventeenth volume of his *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire des hommes illustres dans la république des lettres* (1732) the following judgement about Agrippa's declamations, taken from the *Bibliothèque des Auteurs ecclésiastiques du XVI^e siècle* by the theologian Louis-Ellies Du Pin or Dupin (1657–1719):

'Il écrivoit bien et composoit des Pièces assez justes; mais il étoit trop grand déclamateur, trop satyrique, trop emporté, trop libre et trop hardi. Il ne réfléchissoit pas assez à ce qu'il écrivoit, et le jugement n'étoit pas ce en quoi il excelloit le plus. Semblable à ces Déclamateurs anciens, il ne faisoit pas attention à la solidité de ses raisonnemens, mais seulement à l'impression qu'ils pouvoient faire. Le vraisemblable lui suffisoit, et il se mettoit peu en peine de la certitude.' C'est le jugement que M. du Pin porte de cet auteur.²⁹

'He was a good stylist and wrote fairly well-grounded treatises; but he was too much of a declaimer, too satirical, too short-tempered, too

²⁷ *Der gerettete Vorzug des Männlichen vor dem weiblichen Geschlechte, oder Beleuchtung Cornel. Agrippae Tractäts, darin dem weiblichen vor dem männlichen Geschlechte der Vorzug gegeben*, (. . .), s.l., 1721 (Royal Library, The Hague, 2201 D 29).

²⁸ *Vermaakelyk tractaat, waar in op een satyrische en aangename wyse ondersogt en aangetoond werd, dat het vrouweelyk geslagt in agting en waarde, vry meer in luister en aanzien gehouden moet werden als dat van de mannen*, Amsterdam, 1733, fols. *2^r–*4^r (Royal Library, The Hague, 2202 D 9⁴); there is also an undated edition (*ibid.*, 30 F 19).

²⁹ Nicéron, vol. 17, p. 12. Dupin wrote a detailed article on Agrippa, which contains essentially a survey of the content of each of Agrippa's theological treatises; the judgement quoted by Nicéron is taken from the conclusion of Dupin's article (edition used: *Nouvelle bibliothèque des auteurs ecclésiastiques*, seconde édition revûë, corrigée & augmentée, vol. 14, Paris 1703, pp. 135–145; the judgment quoted by Nicéron, pp. 144–145.)

free-thinking and too independent in his thought. He did not think enough about what he wrote, and discernment was not his strongest point. Like the ancient declaimers, he did not pay attention to the sureness of his reasoning, but only to the impact which it might have. Probability was sufficient for him, and he did not much care about certainty.' This is M. du Pin's judgment on this author.

Dupin does not misjudge Agrippa's declamations as such, but his judgement is marred by the then common prejudice against rhetoric, in that he assumes that rhetorical reasoning, which by its nature deals with topics admitting probable, not certain knowledge, is automatically equivalent to superficial reasoning and is only developed by those authors who do not take things seriously.

4. *De incertitudine in modern scholarship*

This tradition of negative approach to the orator and his declamations exercised a profound influence on the scholarly literature in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Auguste Prost, in his influential biography, voiced the opinion of Tahureau, Turquet and Dupin when he wrote that *De incertitudine* is a 'longue et paradoxale diatribe' (vol. 2, p. 139) and a treatise which 'invite à ne pas accepter sans réserve, comme étant le fond de la pensée de son auteur, tout ce qu'il y dit,' but rather as a 'jeu d'esprit, destiné à amuser ses lecteurs' (vol. 1, p. 114). Here too, the fact that Agrippa chose a rhetorical style for his writings is considered proof of his superficiality and insincerity. Prost judged the *Apologia* to be a weak defense, full of irrelevant subtlety and irony, and he felt that this writing, like *De incertitudine* itself, was not a serious writing (vol. 2, pp. 301–302). Prost likewise voiced the judgment of the centuries preceding him concerning *De nobilitate et praecellentia foeminei sexus*, when he wrote that this writing constitutes 'une amplification de rhétorique à la mode du temps' (vol. 1, p. 161). This perception of Agrippa's declamations is also current in modern studies on the literary paradox in the Renaissance, in which *De incertitudine* and *De nobilitate et praecellentia foeminei sexus* are regularly mentioned as examples of a frivolous, literary joke or of an ironic paradox.³⁰

³⁰ Hauffen, 'Zur Litteratur der ironischen Enkomien,' gives a large survey of ironic praises and briefly discusses Agrippa's *Praise of the Ass* (pp. 172–173). Miller, 'The

Most recently, this negative judgment of the declaimer Agrippa and his rhetorical discourses has been formulated by a number of scholars. What is new in these studies is that two sentences from the *Apologia* on the character and function of the declamation are quoted as proof that Agrippa is himself asserting that a declaimer does not speak his mind clearly and leaves the reader in doubt as to his real intentions. Our observations in chapter 4 concerning Agrippa's defense of *De incertitudine* demonstrate how inaccurate this perception is, and how strongly Agrippa in fact defends the serious intention of *De incertitudine*. Nevertheless, it is useful to review in some detail at this point the current widespread interpretation of the two sentences in question from the *Apologia*. We shall take them as the starting-point of our discussion of how Agrippa explained, following Erasmus, his use of the declamation as a serious form of discourse on important questions.

The first sentence occurs at the end of the *Apologia*:

Proinde declamatio non iudicat, non dogmatizat, sed quae declamationis conditiones sunt, alia ioco, alia serio, alia salse, alia severe dicit; aliquando mea, aliquando aliorum sententia loquitur, quaedam vera, quaedam falsa, quaedam dubia pronuntiat, alicubi disputat, alicubi admonet, non ubique improbat, aut docet aut asserit, nec omni loco animi mei sententiam declarat, multa invalida argumenta adducit, ut habeatur, quod improbet, quodque solvat declamaturus partem diversam, quae quum nesciat hic articulator discernere, nullam de illis nisi stultam poterit ferre sententiam. (chapter 42, fol. I v^r)

In short, the declamation does not pronounce judgements nor dogmatical statements, but, in accordance with the nature of the declamation, it says some things in sport and other things for serious, some things in a joking way and other things in a severe way. Sometimes it

Paradoxical Encomium with Special Reference to its Vogue in England, 1600–1800,' mentions James Sandford's English translation of *De incertitudine* (1569) as a possible influence on the vogue of the literary paradox in England (p. 154). Korkowski, 'Agrippa as Ironist,' presents an analysis of *De incertitudine* on the basis of Sandford's English translation and concludes that it is a *tour de force* in the vein of a mock-blame. Sister M. Geraldine, C.S.J., 'Erasmus and the Tradition of Paradox,' is, to my knowledge, the only author who, in a general survey of the Renaissance paradox, correctly stresses that *De incertitudine* is not an ironic writing, but 'a perfectly straightforward denunciation of such science as is admittedly false, and of the obviously wrong uses of true science' (p. 50). On the other hand, Sister Geraldine seems to fail to appreciate the advisory character of *De incertitudine*. For the modern interpretations of *De nobilitate et praecellentia foeminei sexus*, see also chapter 6, pp. 190 ff.

voices my own thought, and sometimes that of others; it voices some true things, some false things, and some doubtful things. Here it argues, there it admonishes; it does not at all times reject, teach, or make pronouncements. It does not report everywhere my own state of mind, and it brings to the fore many weak arguments, in order that there may be something for the declaimer of the other side of the issue to reject and refute. If our writer of the *Articuli* is not able to make these distinctions, he will never be able to formulate anything but stupid opinions in their regard.

Bowen cites this sentence to support the thesis that *De incertitudine* is a paradoxical writing, that is, an inconclusive and only partly serious rhetorical exercise.³¹ In reality however, Agrippa, looking back to his detailed refutation of the *Articuli*, repeats the main point of the *Apologia*, namely that his declamation does not contain magisterial statements intended to undermine the authority of Rome, but defends a serious point of view in a rhetorical discourse. Summarizing his discussion of the *Articuli*, Agrippa observes that as a declaimer, he developed a variety of argumentative and stylistic techniques allowed in rhetoric to convince the reader rationally and emotionally, yet stresses that he allows for disagreement and prepares for debate.

The second passage occurs at the beginning of the *Apologia* and requires a more detailed discussion:

Est nanque declamationis proprium, in ficto themate, exercendorum studiorum gratia, citra veritatis statuendae regulam, abrogata fide laborare. Qui enim declamationem scribere se profitetur, hoc ipso sibi fidem abrogat, nec quicquam asserit, non etiam ea quae vera et notoria sunt, et quibus alias extra declamationem credere et assentiri teneretur, et de quibus ambigere nefas est. Unde non puto tam iniquos fore theologos, ut omnium illorum quae declamando diximus, aut scripsimus, rationes ad theologorum rigorem exigere velint. (chapter 1, fol. C i^v)

Before I propose a translation of this passage, I shall analyze its content first. Tournon, in chapter 5 ('Du paradoxe à l'essai') of his book on

³¹ Bowen, 'Cornelius Agrippa's *De Vanitate*: Polemic or Paradox?', p. 251. Bowen follows Screech, 'Rabelais, De Billon and Erasmus,' p. 246 and note 3, who referred to this definition of the declamation in the course of his discussion of *De nobilitate et praecellentia foeminei sexus* and the *Querelle des femmes*; Chomarat, *Grammaire et rhétorique chez Erasme*, pp. 940–941, cites the sentence in the context of his definition of the Erasmian declamation as an essay which treats topics without the purpose of reaching a definitive conclusion.

Montaigne, cites the first two sentences of this passage as proof of his view that *De incertitudine* is a logically ambivalent discourse. He offers the following translation:

[a declamation is] un travail sur un thème conventionnel, accompli par manière d'exercice, soustrait aux règles selon lesquelles se détermine la vérité ('*citra veritatis statuendae regulam*'), et qui ne requiert pas l'assentiment ('*abrogata fide*'). En déclarant que l'on écrit une *declamatio*, on renonce de ce fait même à se faire croire ('*sibi fidem abrogat*'); et on ne produit aucune assertion, pas même pour affirmer des vérités notoires que l'on serait tenu de croire et d'admettre, hors de ce cadre, et qu'il est interdit de contester. (Tournon, *Montaigne. La glose et l'essai*, p. 210)

Tournon interprets this passage as follows:

Les critères de vérité doivent donc être tenus à l'écart. Mais dès la page suivante, Agrippa revient sur cette justification, qui pouvait passer pour un reniement de son livre; et il se fait fort de soutenir tout ce qu'il y avançait.

He then cites, in translation, the beginning of chapter 2 of the *Apologia*:

(Unde) licet false et calumniose assertionum titulus istis articulis praeponatur [i.e. by the censor], et ego me uno declamationis vocabulo ab his tuendis absolvere possem, (. . .) nec recusabo hac in parte serio respondere et cum ipsa declamatione mea periclitari, exequarque quocunque modo calumniosorum articulorum ordinem. (*Apologia*, fols. C iij^{r-v})

(Therefore) Bien qu'il soit faux et calomnieux de présenter ces articles comme des assertions, et que je puisse m'abriter sous ce seul terme de *declamatio*, (. . .) je ne refuserai pas cependant de répondre sérieusement sur ces chefs d'accusation, et d'assumer les risques du procès que l'on fait à mon livre. Je vais donc réfuter point par point cette série d'articles calomnieux. (Tournon, *Montaigne. La glose et l'essai*, p. 210)

and he draws the following conclusion:

En somme, il plaide à la fois l'irresponsabilité et le bon droit. Cette in-conséquence apparente, perceptible aussi dans la lettre d'Erasmus à More qui sert de préface à l'*Éloge de la Folie* et dans la lettre à Dorpius qui le justifie, est caractéristique des écrits de ce genre. *Serio ludere*: proférer une vérité et la récuser; affirmer simultanément que les idées avancées sont soutenues par une argumentation spécieuse, et qu'elles sont justes. Par l'effet de cette dénégation retenue, la validité du message reste en

suspens, et en devient le principal problème. (Tournon, *Montaigne. La glose et l'essai*, p. 210)³²

In my view, the modern interpretation of the humanist declamation, as exemplified above by the quotations from Tournon, does not adequately describe the point which Agrippa and Erasmus are making. In the following pages, I shall argue that Agrippa, following Erasmus, is explaining that he adopts the attitude of declaimer because he wishes to convince the reader to follow his insights on the topic at hand or, if he does not agree with them, to present a counter-argumentation. Moreover, Agrippa, facing like Erasmus charges of heresy and contempt of the Church, stresses that it is not his purpose to criticize pointlessly, but only in order to contribute to the scholarly debate over learned matters, and that both the general theme of *De incertitudine* and the particular arguments brought to the fore to support it, remain fully within the limits set on scholarly debate by the teaching of the Church of Rome. In other words, Agrippa stresses that he is not challenging the teaching of Rome, nor is he formulating authoritative statements intended to supplant its teaching.

'Citra veritatis statuendae regulam'; '(sibi) fidem abrogare'

The main problem in Tournon's interpretation of Agrippa's text concerns the notions *'citra veritatis statuendae regulam'* and *'(sibi) fidem abrogare.'* Let us first concentrate on the expression *'citra veritatis statuendae regulam.'*

If we consider the context of the *Apologia*, it is obvious that the word *'veritas'* does not refer to the truth of scientific (Aristotelian), historical or juridical facts, but to the truth of the Christian faith as expressed in the doctrinal teaching of the Church, which Agrippa, according to the theologians, had challenged. In this connection, it is relevant to point out that the expression *'regula veritatis statuendae'* does not refer to the method of inquiry to establish the truth, but rather to the rules of formulating the truth in authoritative statements, once it has been established, and of propagating it.³³ The

³² Compare p. 210, note 19 (at pp. 386–387), where Tournon refers to Colie's definition of *De incertitudine* as an epistemological paradox (*Paradoxia Epidemica*, pp. 400–401), and p. 211, where Tournon argues that *De nobilitate et praecellentia foeminei sexus* is also a literary exercise with a deceitful argumentation. Tournon repeats his point concerning Agrippa in his *'Images du pyrrhonisme selon quelques écrivains de la Renaissance,'* p. 29.

³³ Compare the expression *'ad dissolvendum aut statuendum veritatem'* in the

theologians indeed did not attack Agrippa because they disagreed with his method of theological inquiry, but because they felt that he was diffusing heretical beliefs. Thus, 'citra veritatis statuendae regulam' implies that the distinctive task of a declaimer is not to proclaim the absolute truths of the faith. Hence, Agrippa claims in the same passage that it would be unfair to judge the content of his declamation according to the strict standards which apply to theological writings, or, to use Agrippa's own term, 'rigor theologorum,' a term he borrowed from Erasmus's third apology of the *Encomium matrimonii*, the *Dilutio* of 1532.³⁴

The expression 'fidem abrogare' must be seen in close connection with 'citra veritatis statuendae regulam.' Agrippa also borrowed this expression from Erasmus, who wrote in his first apology of the *Encomium matrimonii*:

Quisquis enim declamationem profitetur, ipse sibi fidem abrogat, ac de ingenio periclitari potest, de fide non potest. (*Apologia pro declamatione matrimonii* [1519]; LB 108 E)

The expression 'fidem abrogare (alicui)' means unequivocally 'to take away credit (from someone),' that is, to arouse doubt as to whether someone's words can be accepted as the truth.³⁵ Hence, when Agrippa says that he deliberately takes away credit from himself ('sibi'), he notifies the reader that we should not accept his words as unquestionable truth. Now in the case of Erasmus's and Agrippa's declamations, the problem raised by the theologians was whether the reader could put faith in the content of the declamation. He could not, said the theologians, because in their view, several statements were at variance with the official teaching of the Church. He indeed could

passage from the *Querela* quoted in chapter 3 above, p. 111. Krieg's translation of 'citra veritatis statuendae regulam' as 'ausserhalb der für die Wahrheitsforschung geltenden Regeln' (in: F. Mauthner, ed., *Die Eitelkeit und Unsicherheit der Wissenschaften und die Verteidigungsschrift*, vol. 2, p. 202) is erroneous.

³⁴ *Dilutio*, ed. Telle, p. 71. Compare the *Appendix de scriptis Jodoci Clithovei* (1526), where Erasmus uses the expression 'exigi ad theologorum placita' (LB IX, 812 F).

³⁵ *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae*, s.v.: abrogare I, and *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, s.v.: abrogare 3 b. For instance Suetonius, *Tiberius*, 61, 8: 'Nemini delatorum fides abrogata' [the word of no informer was doubted] (translation of the Loeb-edition, ed. J.C. Rolfe). The most important other passages recorded are: Plautus, *Trinummus*, 1048; *Ad Herennium* 1, 17 and 2, 12; Cicero, *Academica*, 2, 36 and *Pro Roscio Comoedo*, 44; Livy, 3, 16, 3; 6, 41, 11; 8, 18, 3, and 42, 13, 2; Pliny the Elder, 26, 18; Valerius Maximus, 8, 5, 1; Seneca, *De beneficiis*, 6, 8, 2. In Livy 6, 41, 11, 'fides' does not denote trust or belief, but financial credit. In the passage from Pliny, the expression is used in a scientific context and expresses doubt concerning the efficacy of herbs.

not, retorted Erasmus and Agrippa for their part, because a declamation is not meant to proclaim the unquestionable truths of the faith, but to argue a point of view, an opinion (we shall return to the exact meaning of 'opinio' in a separate paragraph below), by means of probable arguments. Agrippa makes this point very clear by stating, in the passage in question from the first chapter of the *Apologia*, that a declaimer writes 'citra veritatis statuendae regulam, abrogata fide,' and by stressing, in the remaining part of the passage, that the declamation does not contain any pronouncements at all ('nec quicquam asserit' *etc.*).

This does not mean, however, that Agrippa renounces his writing ('un reniement de son livre,' as Tournon puts it), or that he proclaims a truth which he subsequently repudiates, as Tournon states in his final conclusion ('proférer une vérité et la récuser'). Even less does it imply that his declamation was not meant to be taken seriously, but that it was merely a literary joke or an ironic paradox. To the contrary, both Agrippa and Erasmus, in their apologies, defended their declamations as serious, rhetorically (or dialectically) consistent and doctrinally sound discourses. Agrippa indeed undertakes, as we saw in chapter 4, a very detailed refutation of each and every point raised by the censor, as he had done in the controversy around the triple marriage of Saint Anne in 1518. In fact, there exists no discrepancy whatsoever between on the one hand not claiming to pronounce the absolute truth ('sibi fidem abrogare', 'nec quicquam asserere'), and on the other hand vindicating one's right both to defend one's opinion and to maintain the arguments one supplies to explain it.

In conclusion, I propose the following working translation of Erasmus's and Agrippa's statements in this regard. Erasmus's statement in the *Apologia pro declamatione matrimonii* can be rendered as follows:

Whoever presents himself as the author of a declamation, thereby deliberately takes away credit from himself [i.e., he makes it clear that he is not proclaiming the absolute truth, as would be required in a theological treatise] and can run the risk of being attacked on account of lack of talent [i.e., the talent of the orator in arguing convincingly], but not on account of lack of credibility [i.e., the fact that the content of his declamation does not in all places represent the absolute truth].³⁶

³⁶ The rendering of 'ipse sibi fidem abogat' as 'disclaims all responsibility for the opinions stated' in the *Collected Works of Erasmus* (vol. 71, *Controversies*, p. 92) is plainly just an erroneous translation of the Latin, but it does reflect the widespread misunderstanding concerning Erasmus's attitude as a declaimer.

The passage from the first chapter of Agrippa's *Apologia* can be translated thus:

For it is the peculiar characteristic of a declamation to deal with fictitious cases, for the sake of cultivating learned studies, regardless of the rules which apply when the divine truth must be formulated, and it being understood that the author is not proclaiming the absolute truth. For the author who declares that he is writing a declamation thereby makes it clear that he is not proclaiming unquestionable truth, and he is not making any pronouncements, not even of those concepts which are true, commonly known, and which, in other contexts outside of the declamation, one must believe and assent to, and which it is a crime to call into question. Therefore I do not think that the theologians will be so unfair as to wish to judge by the strict standards of theological writing the points I make in the thoughts which I have expressed or written while declaiming.

The thought which Agrippa, following in the footsteps of Erasmus, states here (and which he repeats almost verbatim in the passage from the *Querela* quoted in chapter 3 above),³⁷ is in fact quite uncomplicated and self-evident from the perspective of the modern reader for whom freedom of speech is a commonly assumed right. As orator and declaimer Agrippa is arguing, both in *De incertitudine* and also in his other declamations, his opinion on a subject concerning which the official religious doctrine had not yet formulated a definitive judgment ('themata, de quibus nihil in utramvis partem determinavit ecclesia', *Apologia*, chapter 3, fol. C vii^v; see full quotation below, pp. 176 f.). He does not pretend to know everything and does not expect his readers to accept as unquestionable truth everything he brings to the fore. Far from dissociating himself from his discourse, he explicitly wishes to be taken seriously. He does not require his readers to be credulous; on the contrary, he invites them either to accept his point of view on the basis of the arguments which he presents, or to refute his opinion by means of counter-arguments. But what he wants least is censorship as practised by the theologians, and hence he vigorously resists their censure.

A few elements in the passage from the first chapter of Agrippa's *Apologia*, discussed and translated above, call for additional explanation. First, from the opening sentence of Agrippa's text, the notions

³⁷ *Querela* fol. L vii^r; see above, p. 111.

'in ficto themate' and 'exercendorum studiorum gratia', and secondly the notion of counter-arguments as it appears in our discussion.

'in ficto themate'; 'exercendorum studiorum gratia'

Agrippa's expression 'in ficto themate laborare' echoes the expression 'in fictis thematis versari' which Erasmus uses in his *Apologia pro declamatione matrimonii* (1519):

Quis enim nescit declamationes exercitandi ingenii gratia in fictis thematis versari? (LB 108 A)

Who does not know that declamations are written for the sake of exercising one's inventiveness and deal with fictitious cases?

This sentence amounts to a textbook definition of the declamation such as it had existed as an exercise in the rhetoric schools of ancient Greco-Roman times and had been included in the humanistic *trivium* education of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.³⁸ The notion of fiction in 'fictum thema' refers to the case ('causa'; 'hypothesis') or, in other words, to the imaginary situation and specific circumstances which gives cause to the declamation itself. In this context, the fiction of the case implies that the declaimer enjoys a certain distance from reality, but it does not imply that the case is entirely untrue to real life, nor that it must be discussed in such a way that it has no implications for real life. To the contrary, Erasmus's description of the fictional case of the young man who is reluctant to get married is, for the sixteenth-century reader, lifelike, and Erasmus makes an effort to discuss it both in light of the problems which existed concerning marriage in the Christian world of the early sixteenth century, and against the background of the general considerations regarding marriage which are relevant to every person, at any time and in any place, who deliberates whether to get married or to stay single.

In this particular sense, the notion 'in ficto themate' does not apply to Agrippa's *De incertitudine* and his other declamations, since they do not, unlike Erasmus's *Encomium matrimonii*, discuss fictional cases. On the other hand, Agrippa's position as a declaimer is comparable to the position of the declaimer of fictional cases, in that he chooses his subject and defends his view independently from circumstances which

³⁸ See Van der Poel, *De declamatio bij de humanisten*, part 2.

would impose restraints on his independence, for instance in discourses undertaken in any of the official duties which he performed (e.g., the position of travelling ambassador and legal adviser of the city of Metz), or in discourses commissioned with a concrete political purpose in mind (e.g., a discourse against the divorce of Henry VIII, which Eustache Chapuy once asked him to write).³⁹ Agrippa indeed uses the notion 'in ficto themate' to express the thought that in his declamations, he is writing on learned subjects ('exercendorum studiorum gratia'), under the aegis of academic freedom, to use a modern term. This is the same thought which Erasmus expresses in his second defense of the *Encomium matrimonii* by means of the phrase 'in ficto themate, in quo declamator neutram partem praestare cogitur' [in a fictitious theme, concerning which the declaimer is not required to take either of the two sides].⁴⁰

in utramque partem

The fact that Agrippa supposes that a refutation of his *De incertitudine* by means of counter-arguments is feasible, and even invites the reader to present such arguments (see the end of the passage from chapter 42 of the *Apologia*, quoted above, p. 167), follows from the dialectical nature that is also a characteristic of the ancient declamation.⁴¹ In Agrippa's case, it is precisely linked with the fact that declamations are written, as he puts it, 'exercendorum studiorum gratia,' that is, in order to practise scholarly learning, and thus, to engage in an open exchange of arguments and counter-arguments. Agrippa discusses this point explicitly in the following passage from chapter 3 of the *Apologia*, which complements the definition of the declamation given in chapter 1 of the *Apologia*:

Dico igitur quam iste articulorum exceptor primam assertionem vocat, nequaquam esse assertionem, sed disputandum, inquirendum, et persuadendum thema, totiusque declamationis argumentum, expectans diversum, ab alio vel alio tempore declamari.

³⁹ See chapter 4 above, p. 121, note 12.

⁴⁰ *Appendix de scriptis Jodoci Clithovei*, LB IX, 813 C.

⁴¹ Cicero, *Ad Att.* 9, 4; Bonner, *Roman Declamation in the Late Republic and Early Empire*, p. 51. 'Quis enim nescit, (...) harum (sc. declamationum) hanc esse naturam, ut in utramque partem tractentur [Who does not know that (...) it is the nature of declamations that they are treated both for and against?]' (Erasmus, *Apologia pro declamatione matrimonii*; LB IX, 108 AB). See also Erasmus, *Appendix de scriptis Jodoci Clithovei*, LB IX, 812 F.

Quod autem non sit assertio, ipsa quae sequuntur verba palam faciunt, ubi aio: 'Ea autem modestia hanc sententiam meam a vobis accipi volo, ut me nec alios velle reprehendere, qui diversum sentiunt, nec mihi aliquid arrogare insolentius putetis' [*De incertitudine*, chapter 1, ed. 1531, fol. 11^v; *Opera*, p. 2], in quibus verbis palam significo me nequaquam omnia et singula, quae in ea declamatione dicuntur, velle pro veris asserere et adversus quae nulli liceat repugnare, sed me de illis per modum opinionis, cum patientia oppositi, citra veritatis regulam probabiliter velle declamare. (*Apologia*, fols. C vii^{r-v})

Therefore I maintain that what that writer of the *Articuli* calls my first pronouncement constitutes by no means a pronouncement, but the theme which I would discuss, examine, and about which I would write a persuasive text, in other words, the subject-matter of my entire declamation, (which I wrote) while hoping for a declamation containing the other side of the argument, to be written by someone else, or by me at another moment.

That it is not a formal declaration is made clear by the very words which follow, where I say: 'I want you to take this as my view, expressed with modesty, that is, without the intention to reproach those who think differently, nor with the desire to put forward my thought with arrogance.' Through these words, I indicate clearly that I do not want to declare that all the thoughts together and each thought individually in that declamation constitute the truth to which it is not permitted to raise objections, but that I want to declaim about them as about an opinion, granting that the opposite belief is also legitimate, regardless of the rules which apply to the truth (i.e., the formulation of the truth), and using probable arguments.

In this passage, Agrippa relates the basic notion of free exchange of ideas among scholars, in other words, the notion of pro and con reasoning, to the rhetorical art of declaiming. He then goes on immediately to compare the rhetorical art of declaiming with the dialectical art of debating, more specifically with the *disputatio* such as it was practised in the theological faculties of his time. Before Agrippa, Erasmus had drawn this comparison in the three defenses of his *Encomium matrimonii*.⁴²

Non enim omnis qui dissentit disputando protinus damnat, neque qui sibi nihil insolenter arrogat, adversus diversum sentientes protinus asserit aut pertinaciter defendit. Recentiores theologi sexcentis locis dissi-

⁴² e.g. LB IX, 108 D; 813 B; *Dilutio*, ed. Telle, p. 73.

dent a dogmatibus veterum et inter seipsos etiam contrariis opinionibus depugnant, neque tamen sic sua asserunt, quod adversariorum placita, veluti blasphemia et haeretica damnent, praesertim in illis conflictationum suarum thematibus, de quibus nihil in utramvis partem determinavit ecclesia. (*Apologia*, chapter 3, fol. C vii^v)

For every one who disagrees in a disputation does not immediately denounce, nor does one who does not arrogantly make any claim on his own account make any formal declaration against those who disagree with him nor does he stubbornly defend his opinion. The theologians of recent times disagree in countless places with the beliefs of the old theologians, and they even fight hard amongst each other with opposite opinions. Still, they do not uphold their own opinion in such a way that they condemn the things which their opponents believe as blasphemous and heretical beliefs, specially in controversies about things concerning which the Church has not settled the issue either way.

In formal terms, the dialectical, pro and con, nature of the declamation refers to the fact that rhetoric, like dialectic, investigates only topics about which disagreement exists and about which it is possible to argue different points of view, but impossible to reach indubitable knowledge. As such, philosophy and rhetoric are both different from theology, which does define and teach absolute truth. The reason why Agrippa and Erasmus stress the dialectical nature of the declamation is not that they are insincere intellectuals without personal convictions, but that they wish to resist the tendency of the professional theologians who were silencing the advocates of reform in the Church and monopolizing the debate over religious issues by appealing unnecessarily to the dogmas and the authority of the Church. In this context, Erasmus points out in the three apologies of his *Encomium matrimonii* that this desire to monopolize the debate concerning theological matters is at variance with scholasticism itself. In the faculties of theology, Erasmus stresses, there exists a lively tradition of dialectical debate (*disputatio*) on theological topics. In these debates, he argues, it was always common to raise questions about any theological topic, even about basic doctrinal points in religion, without invoking the authority of the Church and without casting doubt on the debater's orthodoxy.⁴³ His point is that if it is permitted in

⁴³ Erasmus mentions the quodlibetical disputations, the *vesperiae* (*Apologia pro declaratione matrimonii*, LB IX, 107 C) and the *obligatorium* (*Dilutio*, ed. Telle, p. 73). See for the *vesperiae* and the *obligatorium* Clasen OFM, 'Collectanea zum Studien und

theological *disputationes* to say controversial and even heretical things because *disputationes* are only debates, then this must also be permitted in rhetorical exercises.⁴⁴ For rhetoric, like dialectic, deals with probable, debatable things, not the established truth.

Agrippa also compares his rhetorical reasoning with the dialectical reasoning in scholastic disputations in chapter 2 of the *Apologia*, discussed in our chapter 3 above (p. 114), in which he compares the hyperbole of the main thesis of *De incertitudine* to extraordinary statements which often occur in scholastic disputations, such as the one by Thomas Aquinas on the Eucharist, referred to by Erasmus in his 1526 *Appendix de scriptis Jodoci Clithovei*.⁴⁵ In both passages, Agrippa's point is twofold. On the one hand he states that *De incertitudine*, as a piece of rhetoric, is not meant to formulate in a doctrinal statement religious truths which must not be called into question, but merely discusses a viewpoint which is open to scholarly debate, as the theologians do in their disputations. On the other hand, he complains about the prevailing lack of tolerance on the part of professional

Buchwesen des Mittelalters', *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie*, 42 (1960), p. 205; 43 (1961), p. 271. In the *Apologia pro declamatione matrimonii* Erasmus mentions the example of reasoning pro and con the thesis that fornication is a mortal sin (LB IX, 108 D; this example is taken from Thomas Aquinas's *Summa theologiae*, II^a II^{ae}, q. 154, a. 2). In the *Appendix de scriptis Jodoci Clithovei*, he observes that theologians would protest if one were to attack Thomas Aquinas for defending the thesis that in the Eucharist, it would be better to represent the body of Christ by means of the flesh of cattle than by means of bread and wine, for the theologians would claim that Thomas also gave the arguments against this thesis (LB IX, 813 B; according to Agrippa, who also cites this example in chapter 2 of his *Apologia*, it is taken from Thomas Aquinas's *Disputationes quodlibetae*). Erasmus makes a similar point in the *Dilutio*, quoting two examples from Thomas Aquinas and Duns Scotus (*Dilutio*, ed. Telle, p. 74). In the *Apologia* of 1519, Erasmus also observes that a malicious reader could find heretical statements in virtually every Christian author from ancient to modern times, such as Cyprian, Hilarius, Jerome, Ambrosius, Augustine, Duns Scotus, Thomas Aquinas, Peter of Lombard and Gerson (LB IX, 110 EF).

⁴⁴ 'Qui inter Theologos proferunt Aristotelis placita ex diametro pugnantia cum doctrina Christi, sat habent dicere, loquor ut Philosophus' [Those who voice Aristotelian doctrines which are diametrically opposed to the teaching of Christ, are sufficiently justified by saying: I speak as a philosopher (and therefore it is unfair to judge the content of a declamation by strict theological standards)] (*Appendix de scriptis Jodoci Clithovei*, LB IX, 812 F). 'In concertationibus scholasticis etiamsi quid dicitur repugnans catholicae veritati, satis est dicere, Nunc loquor ut philosophus: et mihi nihil proderit vociferanti, Loquor ut rhetor, nec formo mores, sed instruo linguam?' [In scholastic disputations, it is enough to say: 'I speak as a philosopher now', even if something is said which goes against the truth of faith; would it then for me not do to cry aloud, 'I speak as a rhetor, I do not teach moral theology, but I train the ability to speak?'] (*Dilutio*, ed. Telle, p. 71).

⁴⁵ See above, note 43, and below, p. 182.

theologians and their unwillingness to engage in the open exchange of ideas with theologians who do not share their views.

opinio

In the context of this second point, Agrippa's use of the phrase 'per modum opinionis' in his explanation on the dialectical character of *De incertitudine* is specially useful. The term 'opinio' indeed denotes, in the scholastic system, a form of reasoning that is closely akin in character and intention to Agrippa's declamations. By using this term, Agrippa makes the point that his declamation fits into the tradition of open intellectual debate which existed among Christian theologians from the time of the Church Fathers until the early days of scholasticism. He makes this point most clearly in a passage from the *Querela*, examined in chapter 3 above,⁴⁶ where he compares his declamation with various kinds of dialectical writings in the scholastic tradition, namely 'opiniones,' 'disputationes' and 'problemata.' Although the precise definition of *opinio* seems to vary in different authors and ages, it was generally considered to be an intellectual position which its proponent argued as being possible, based on dialectical argumentation or even supported by *auctor(itat)es* alone, but with the admission or 'fear' that such a position could be erroneous.⁴⁷ In the scholastic system, it must be distinguished from *scientia*, which pertains, through inductive or demonstrative argumentation, to universal truths.⁴⁸

In other words, the term 'opinio' denotes exactly the dialectical nature of Agrippa's theological writings. In fact, Agrippa had used this term in *De originali peccato* to explain that this declamation was

⁴⁶ *Querela*, fol. L vii^r; see above, p. 111.

⁴⁷ Thomas Aquinas defines 'opinio' as follows: 'Opinio enim significat actum intellectus, qui fertur in unam partem contradictionis cum formidine alterius' [Opinion means an act of the intellect aimed at one viewpoint with the fear that the contradictory viewpoint might be true]. See for source references and other definitions of 'opinio' with the same purport Schütz, *Thomas-Lexikon*, s.v.: opinio; see for a larger study of 'opinio' in the work of Aquinas Byrne, *Probability and Opinion*, chapter 4 ('Probability in disputation and demonstration'), pp. 139–187. See for the notion of 'opinio' in the Aristotelian scholastic theory of knowledge in a broader context Seifert, *Logik zwischen Scholastik und Humanismus*, pp. 83–89 and notes, pp. 155–161 (Seifert uses a wide variety of authors, from St. Thomas Aquinas to Eck). In Agrippa's time, Clichthove defines 'opinio' as 'alicuius cum incertitudine credulitas,' and Lefèvre d'Étaples presents the definition 'infirmus inconstansque assensus' (Seifert, p. 155, note 44).

⁴⁸ See St. Thomas Aquinas, as quoted in Byrne, p. 185, n. 1.

meant as a contribution to the debate on Original Sin. Agrippa introduces his view on Original Sin in *De originali peccato* as follows:

Multi et veteres et recentiores theologi super hac re [i.e. Original Sin] multa opinati sunt, et unusquisque eorum in suo sensu abundat. Quicum nescio an plane venia dignum sit meam quoque opinionem conferre, opinionem dico, non fidem, non scientiam, ut, si erronea fuerit opinio mea, ab errore verae fidei ac incontaminatae Christianae sapientiae praevaricatione sim alienus. Atque hac conditione nunc libere opinari licebit, et si, ut enim homo sum immaturae aetatis, ingenii ac litteraturae minoris, in sensu meo non tantis scripturarum testimoniis abundem ut res ipsa requirit, forsitan sequentur me doctiores quidam, quibus haec nostra opinio non displicebit. Ab his me non modicum adiuvari posse confido, quatenus validioribus rationibus ac argumentis suis opinionem nostram robustiorem effecerint. (*Collected Treatises*, fol. I 5^v; *Opera*, p. 554)

Many theologians, both in ancient and in more recent times, have issued a great variety of viewpoints on this matter. Each one of them is fully persuaded in his own mind [cp. Romans 14, 5; Sirach (Ecclesiasticus) 19, 21]. I am not sure if it is truly worthwhile to add my opinion to theirs; opinion, I say, not faith, or knowledge. Consequently, if my opinion is erroneous, I shall not be considered as one erring in true faith and pure Christian wisdom. This being so, I am allowed to freely hold an opinion, and if (for I am a man of immature age and equipped with little intelligence and education) I do not provide a sufficient number of scriptural passages, as the subject requires, to illustrate my interpretation, perhaps some more learned than I, agreeing with my opinion, will follow me and, I trust, will give me substantial support insofar as they will corroborate my opinion with better reasons and supportive arguments.

In *De originali peccato*, Agrippa also uses the term 'opinio' to express the intellectual modesty with which he formulates his contribution to the debate. More specifically, he uses it to clarify the dialectical nature of his treatise and to declare his willingness to submit it to the authority of the Church. The conclusion of *De originali peccato* emphasizes this:

Quod si minus recte assecutus sum, fateor me opinionem scripsisse, non fidem, non scientiam, opinionem autem talem, cui nec ego aliter assentior, nec aliter quemquam assentiri volo, nisi quatenus a Sancta Christiana ecclesia non fuerit reprobata. (*Collected Treatises*, fol. K 4^r; *Opera*, p. 565)

If I have not reached my goal [that is, to prove that the sexual act constitutes Original Sin], I declare that I have written an opinion, not a proclamation of faith, not a statement purveying scientific certainty, but an opinion which I only desire to hold myself and only desire other people to agree with insofar as it has not been rejected in any degree by the Holy Christian Church.

Both these elements are also present in the dedicatory letter to Theodorich Wichwael of *De originali peccato*, which begins as follows:

De originali peccato primaque hominis transgressionem apud doctissimos praestantissimosque tam veteres quam recentiores sacrarum literarum interpretes, variae fuerunt sententiae, quas animo mecum cum saepe revolverem, nihil mihi praeter obscura quaedam, et ambigua scripsisse videbantur. Non contemptis igitur, sed relictis eorum opinionibus, aliam, novamque, et meam opinionem (disputabilem duntaxat et fortasse non falsam) adferam, . . . (*Collected Treatises*, fol. I 3^r; *Opera*, p. 550; *Epistolae*, 2, 17, p. 662).

There have existed various ideas on Original Sin, that is, the first offence of man, among the most learned and prominent interpreters of Scripture, both in ancient and in more recent times. As often as I turn over these ideas in my mind, these writers seem to me to have written nothing but some unclear and ambiguous things. Therefore, I have not neglected these views, but I have put them aside and will bring forward a new and different opinion, entirely my own, which is at the very least debatable and perhaps not wrong.

Agrippa also explains the dialectical nature of his reasoning and the modesty with which he develops it in the following statement from the first chapter of *De incertitudine*. The importance of this statement is clear from the third chapter of the *Apologia*. Here, Agrippa refers back to it in a section of his self-defence, in which he explains that the aim of his declamation is not to pronounce a dogmatical statement, but simply to discuss an argument concerning which the intelligent reader can form his own opinion:

Ideoque converso ordine agendum censeo, et scientias ipsas non tantis praeconiis extollendas, sed magna ex parte vituperandas esse, mea opinio est, nec ullam esse, quae careat iusta reprehensionis censura, neque rursus, quae ex seipsa laudem aliquam mereatur, nisi quam a possessoris probitate mutuatur. Ea autem modestia hanc sententiam meam a vobis accipi volo, ut me nec alios velle reprehendere, qui diversum sentiunt, nec mihi aliquid arrogare insolentius putetis. (*De incertitudine*, ed. 1531, fol. 11^v; *Opera*, p. 2)

Therefore [i.e. since I believe that the arts are harmful] I think that one must choose a reverse approach. It is my opinion that the sciences must not be extolled so highly, but that they must be disapproved of for the better part. Also, I feel that there is no science which does not merit some justified blame, and on the other hand that no science deserves any praise on its own terms, but only earns that praise which it borrows from the uprightness of the scientist. I want you to take this as my belief, expressed with modesty, that is, without the intention of reproaching those who think differently, or with the desire to put forward my own thought with self-assertion.

In *De originali peccato* and the first chapter of *De incertitudine*, the use of the scholastic term 'opinio' serves only to explain to the scholastic theologian who is unfamiliar with the declamation that the declamation which Agrippa is presenting to the reader should be placed in the tradition of the university debates in theology. In the *Apologia*, Agrippa repeats the same point, but now it also serves as an argument to denounce his opponents, whom Agrippa presents as the first theologians since the Church Fathers to break with the tradition of open, respectful debate over differences of opinion among theologians within the framework of sound doctrine as defined by the Church of Rome. We have seen that, in fact, Erasmus had already touched upon this point when he mentioned the pro and con views in the work of Thomas Aquinas, and so, as already noted earlier, Agrippa is also in this respect tributary to Erasmus. In chapter 2 of the *Apologia*, Agrippa indeed repeats the example of Thomas's view on the Eucharist, and supplements it with a long list of extraordinary statements from a variety of authors, ranging from the Church Fathers to contemporary theologians, which could even be branded as contrary to current Church doctrine. In chapter 20 of the *Apologia* he picks up on this point once more, and he enumerates some other statements concerning God and Saint Mary, discussed in the scholastic sources, which Agrippa for his part considers to be impious statements.⁴⁹

5. Conclusion

Our investigation (chapters 2 through 5) reveals a clear picture of Agrippa as a theologian. He rejects the scholastic system as a method

⁴⁹ *Apologia*, fol. E viii^v.

of inquiry in theology for two reasons. First, he is convinced, as a Neoplatonist, that it is impossible to penetrate the world of faith through logical reasoning. Secondly, he believes that scholastic theology, as it is practised in his time, is not an art suitable for unpretentious research and pious living, but merely a theatrical art performed for its own sake by arrogant scholars competing with one another. A strong element of Neoplatonism and mysticism is present in Agrippa's thinking, but he is not a fideist or a mystic. According to Agrippa, rational study in theological matters is possible and necessary, because humankind, in its depravation after the Fall, does not fully perceive God's manifestation of Himself in Scripture, and because mistakes have crept into the transmission of Scripture throughout the ages. Therefore, Biblical exegesis, particularly the search for the hidden meaning of the Biblical message, is appropriate. In the context of Biblical exegesis, rational investigation of the scholarly tradition in the Church is useful, within the limits set by the doctrine of the Church. As a practical researcher in the field of theology, Agrippa reveals himself as a strong opponent of the university theologians and those who practise theology following their example. He is disdainful of their work, because he feels that they are not competent in Biblical exegesis. Moreover, he criticizes them severely because they arrogantly assert their own views, while being unwilling to listen to the opinions of those who do not agree with them. According to Agrippa, the professional theologians thus break with the tradition of honest debate among theologians in the service of the Christian commonwealth, and hence considerably contribute to the contemporary crisis in the Church. Inasmuch as Agrippa is mainly interested in Bible study, inasmuch as he believes that theology, instead of being a purely intellectual endeavor, should also teach and encourage humankind to live piously, and inasmuch as he opposes the professional theologians of his time, Agrippa is a humanist theologian.

As for Agrippa's declamations, it is possible to summarize his observations concerning the genre of the declamation, as presented in chapters 4 and 5, and in keeping with our discussion of the rhetorical strategies developed in his declamations as follows:

1. Agrippa's declamations constitute the counterweight to the scholastic disputation. As such, they investigate rationally questions about which Scripture does not make conclusive, authoritative statements, and about which the Church has not yet made a definitive pronouncement in the form of dogma, confirmed by universal consensus.

2. Agrippa's declamations deal with issues concerning faith and morality, but are explicitly addressed not only to professional theologians, but also to a broader readership of educated people.
3. Agrippa's declamations aim at teaching and convincing the readership by means of rational and emotional persuasion. The goal of the persuasion is twofold, both to instigate or contribute to debate, and to stimulate the reader's inner reflection. As such, his declamations resist the inclination of the professional theologians to suppress open debate about differences of opinion concerning topics hitherto not settled dogmatically, and they encourage people to reflect on existential and moral questions.
4. Agrippa's declamations aim at contributing, by means of rational argumentation, to the elucidation of obscurities in God's revelation of Himself and His purposes.
5. Agrippa's declamations aim at contributing, by means of a combination of rational argumentation and emotional persuasion, to the encouragement of the faithful to live in accordance with the moral standards taught by the Gospel.

Against the background of these conclusions, we can now examine in some detail Agrippa's three remaining declamations. In chronological order, we shall focus our attention on *De nobilitate et praecellentia foeminei sexus*, then on *De originali peccato*, and finally on *De sacramento matrimonii*.

CHAPTER SIX

DE NOBILITATE ET PRAECELLENTIA FOEMINEI SEXUS

1. *Composition and publication of De nobilitate et praecellentia foeminei sexus*

The inaugural lecture which Agrippa delivered in 1509 at the University of Dôle was a eulogy of Margaret of Austria, the daughter of Emperor Maximilian, who was governor of Franche-Comté.¹ This speech has not survived, but we know that it was an eminent address, since the following day a friend congratulated Agrippa enthusiastically and extolled his delivery, as we saw in chapter 3. This friend also requested Agrippa's permission to translate the speech into French, both as a linguistic exercise for his own benefit and in order that Princess Margaret might read the speech herself:

Peto igitur instantissime, ut mihi liceat eandem orationem luculentissimam interpretari, non, quod in eadem maiestate eam reddere gallicanam aut sperem aut pollicear, verum ingenioli rudis periclitandi gratia et etiam, ut ipsa illustrissima Princeps nostra intelligat, quam praeclare in eius laudem orasti, eoque rebus tuis libentius faveat, quandoquidem rem hanc apud eam multum admodum tuarum virtutum opinionem adaucturam esse arbitror. (*Epistolae*, 1, 15, n.d. [1509], p. 614)

I urge you strongly to allow me to translate your brilliant speech, not because I hope or promise to render it into French with the same splendor, but for the sake of exercising my unpolished talent, small as it is, and mostly in order that our most illustrious Princess may understand herself how beautifully you have spoken to celebrate her, and, as

¹ In the dedicatory letter to Transsylvanus, composed 20 years later, Agrippa writes: 'Anni ferme viginti retroacti sunt (...) quo tempore in Dola Burgundiae gymnasio pulpito donatus (...) librum Ioan. Capnionis: De Verbo Mirifico ad honorem divae Margaretae Principis nostrae interpretabar habita in praelectione insigni laudum suarum oratione' [It is approximately twenty years ago (...) at which time I was given a chair at the University of Dôle in Burgundy (...) I expounded the writing of John Reuchlin, *De verbo mirifico*, in honor of the divine Margaret, our Governor, after I had delivered, in my inaugural address, a distinguished eulogy of her] (*Collected Treatises*, fol. A ij^r; Antonioli, p. 46, l. 3–8).

a result, may exert herself more willingly in your interest, because I feel that this matter will substantially increase her appreciation of your talents.

At this time, influential men like Simon Vernier, the Deacon of Dôle, and the vice-chancellor of its university, the Archbishop Antoine de Vergy, were urging Agrippa to write a treatise and dedicate it to the Princess, emphasizing that this would enlarge his influence with the Princess. Agrippa thought he should act in accordance with these wishes, and planned to write *De nobilitate et praecellentia foeminei sexus*.² Due to his untimely departure from Dôle as a result of the attacks of the Dominican Catilinet against his lectures on Reuchlin's *De verbo mirifico*, Agrippa did not publish his tract in 1509. It was published only twenty years later as one of the declamations in the *Collected Treatises* of 1529,³ after he had once again entered the service of Margaret of Austria, this time in the Low Countries, where she was also governor. For this occasion, he slightly revised the original text, which had been completed in 1509 or soon after. The treatise was accompanied by an undated dedicatory letter to Princess Margaret and a letter, dated 16 April 1529, to recommend his treatise to the protection of Maximilianus Transsylvanus, the secretary of Charles V.⁴

2. The debate for and against women in the middle ages and the renaissance

De nobilitate et praecellentia foeminei sexus belongs, together with *De incertitudine*, among Agrippa's most popular writings. The Latin text was reprinted, as part of the *Collected Treatises*, in 1532.⁵ After Agrippa's death, it was reprinted four times in the sixteenth century, aside from its publication in the *Opera* editions.⁶ The numerous translations of

² See for this the dedicatory letter to Maximilianus Transsylvanus (*Collected Treatises*, fol. A ij^r; Antonioli, p. 46, l. 3–8).

³ See for these data also the dedicatory letter to Maximilianus Transsylvanus (*Collected Treatises*, fols. A ij^{r-v}; Antonioli, pp. 46–47).

⁴ See on Transsylvanus Roersch, 'Maximilien Transsylvanus, humaniste et secrétaire de Charles-Quint.'

⁵ *Index Aureliensis*, no. 101.846 (see also no. 101.849).

⁶ *De nobilitate . . . , cum orationibus, epistolis et aliis quibusdam*, s.l., 1567 (*Index Aureliensis*, no. 101.891), id., 1568 (*Index Aureliensis*, no. 101.895), *De nobilitate . . .*, Cologne, 1598

the treatise constitute a striking illustration of the popularity of the treatise. In the sixteenth century alone, five French translations are recorded (two in 1530,⁷ one in 1537,⁸ one in 1542,⁹ and one in 1578),¹⁰ two German translations (one by J. Herold(t) from 1540¹¹ and one by B. Menz from 1597),¹² two English translations (one by D. Clapam of 1542¹³ and one by W. Bercher from 1559),¹⁴ and two Italian translations, one probably from around 1530,¹⁵ and one from 1544, reprinted in 1545 and 1549.¹⁶

The popularity of Agrippa's treatise is explained by the fact that during the sixteenth century it played a prominent part in the scholarly (i.e. mostly Latin) and extensive, more general (i.e. mostly vernacular) Renaissance literature for and against women, whose acme was reached between 1541 and 1555, and which constitutes the so-called *Querelle des femmes*.¹⁷ It is commonly assumed that Agrippa's treatise

(*Index Aureliensis*, no. 101.908), *De incertitudine . . . De nobilitate . . . De matrimonio*, Cologne, 1598 (*Deutsche Gesamtkatalog*, no. 2.3948; this edition was reprinted a number of times between 1602 and 1714, see for some of these editions the *Deutsche Gesamtkatalog*, nos. 2.3949–3955).

⁷ Antwerp, 1530, printed by Mart. de Keyser, translator unknown (Nijhoff-Kronenberg, vol. 2, no. 2254; *Index Aureliensis*, no. 101.833) and Paris 1530, translated by Galliot du Pré and printed by Denis Janot (see Telle, *L'œuvre de Marguerite d'Angoulême, reine de Navarre et la querelle des femmes*, p. 46, note 4. Telle, *ibid.*, also mentions a French verse adaptation of 1541).

⁸ Lyon, printed by François Juste, 1537 (see Prost, vol. 2, Appendice, note 28, p. 506).

⁹ Mentioned by Prost, vol. 2, p. 535.

¹⁰ Published in Paris, translated by L. Vivant (*Index Aureliensis*, no. 101.899).

¹¹ *Index Aureliensis*, no. 101.868. There exists another edition of Frankfurt a.M., 1566 (*Index Aureliensis*, no. 101.889).

¹² *Index Aureliensis*, no. 101.907.

¹³ *Index Aureliensis*, no. 101.871. There exists another edition from London, 1545 (*Index Aureliensis*, no. 101.876).

¹⁴ *National Union Catalog, pre-1956 imprints*, vol. 5, p. 304.

¹⁵ *Index Aureliensis*, no. 101.834.

¹⁶ This translation was made from one of the French translations. See the *Index Aureliensis*, nos. 101.875, 101.877 and 101.880.

¹⁷ Rochon, *Images de la femme dans la littérature italienne de la Renaissance*, pp. 157–165, provides a list of treatises on women published in Italy between 1471 and 1560. Albistur—Armogathe, *Histoire du féminisme français du moyen âge à nos jours*, pp. 81–83, provide a list of treatises on women published in France during the sixteenth century. Anthologies of some important treatises on women in O'Faolain—Martines, eds., *Not in God's Image. Women in History from the Greeks to the Victorians*, pp. 179–218 (including fragments from a sixteenth-century English translation of *De nobilitate foeminei sexus*) and Bornstein, *The Feminist Controversy of the Renaissance* (including the 1670 English translation of *De nobilitate foeminei sexus*). Curnow, *The "Livre de la Cité des Dames" of Christine de Pisan: A Critical Edition*, vol. 1, pp. 269 ff., reviews some examples of works in French and Spanish Renaissance literature showing the influence of Christine de Pisan's *Cité des Dames*.

was an important source for sixteenth-century authors who wrote in favor of women, specially for the court poets in the circle of Margaret of Angoulême who glorified platonic love.¹⁸

Although the role of *De nobilitate et praecellentia foeminei sexus* in the Renaissance debate for and against women is not the focus of this chapter, a brief outline of this debate is necessary to introduce our analysis of *De nobilitate et praecellentia foeminei sexus*. Renaissance literature for and against women is a continuation of the equally rich current of belletristic literature for and, mostly, against women which existed in the Middle Ages.¹⁹ The opinions concerning women and their relation to men expressed in these writings were in their turn nourished by a long tradition of Christian misogyny, that was initiated by a number of prominent Church Fathers, consolidated by canonical law, and broadened through appeal to Aristotle by the scholarly thinking of the scholastics. The Church Father Tertullian, for instance, referring to Genesis 3, 16, described the inferiority of women in harsh tones in the introductory chapter of his *De cultu feminarum* [On the Dress of Women]:

Tu es diaboli ianua, tu es arboris illius resignatrix, tu es divinae legis prima desertrix, tu es quae eum persuasisti, quem diaboli aggredi non valuit, tu imaginem dei, hominem, tam facile elisisti. Propter tuum meritum, id est mortem, etiam filius Dei mori habuit. (*De cultu feminarum*, 1, 1, 2)²⁰

You are the gateway for the devil, you are the one who unseals the tree of evil, you are the first one to abandon God's law, you are the one who has persuaded him, whom the devil could not approach, you brought down so easily the image of God, that is, man. Because of what you merit, that is death, even the son of God had to die.

¹⁸ See, e.g., *Dictionnaire des littératures de la langue française*, s.v. Querelle des femmes (vol. 3, pp. 1835–1837). Kelso, *Doctrine for the Lady of the Renaissance*, p. 284, lists six other treatises, written after Agrippa's tract, which argue what Kelso calls the extremist view of the superiority of women.

¹⁹ Useful historical surveys in Telle, *L'œuvre de Marguerite d'Angoulême, reine de Navarre et la querelle des femmes*, chapters 1 and 2; Angenot, *Les champions des femmes. Examen du discours sur la supériorité des femmes 1400–1800*, pp. 11–19; Antonioli, introduction, pp. 14–22.

²⁰ Ed. M. Turcan, Sources Chrétiennes, vol. 173, pp. 42–44. Other samples of negative judgments of women in Tertullian: *De virginibus velandis*, 7 (ed. P. Borleffs, CSEL, vol. 76, p. 89; women must submit to men), *Ibid.*, 10 (CSEL, vol. 76, pp. 93–94; it is more difficult for women than for men to be chaste); *Apologeticum*, 6 (ed. H. Hoppe, CSEL, vol. 69, pp. 15–18; morals of women are in a deplorable state).

Even among Church Fathers who are not expressly misogynous, the notion that women must be subject to men is very common. Thus, Augustine writes that woman is inferior to man both by nature²¹ and by law.²² Scholastic philosophers intensified the negative attitude to women by including in the discussion on the position of women in Church and society the observations of Aristotle on the weaknesses of the female sex.²³

Among the anti-feminist literature of the Middle Ages, two writings are predominant: the famous allegorical romance *Roman de la Rose*, specially the second part written by Jean de Meung in 1265;²⁴ and the *Lamentationes Matheoli*, a Latin poem, translated into French a century later, around 1373, by Jean Le Fèvre de Ressons, who also wrote a refutation of the *Lamentationes*, entitled *Rebours de Matheolus* or *Livre de Leesce*.²⁵

During the fifteenth century, several important works were written in favor of women. Christine de Pisan (1364–1430) was the protagonist in the well-known literary debate on the *Roman de la Rose*. She opposed Jean de Meung's anti-feminism in several writings, among which the most famous is the didactic poem *Le livre de la cité des dames* (1404–1407).²⁶ In this influential book, Christine de Pisan defends women, stressing that they can be as competent as men and even surpass them in faithfulness, piety, and professional skills.²⁷ Martin Le Franc, the Provost of Lausanne, expressed his admiration for Christine in his poem *Le Champion des dames* (1442), which is also a

²¹ *Confessiones* 13, 32 (ed. P. Knöll, CSEL, vol. 33, section 1, part 1, pp. 384–385); *De genesi ad litteram*, 11, 37 (ed. I. Zycha, CSEL, vol. 28, part 1, p. 372); *Quaestiones in Heptateuchum*, 1, 153 (ed. I. Zycha, CSEL, vol. 28, part 2, pp. 79–80).

²² *Quaestiones in Heptateuchum*, 5, 33 (ed. I. Zycha, CSEL, vol. 28, part 2, pp. 394–395).

²³ The *locus classicus* is Aristotle, *De generatione animalium* 2, c (737 a 27). A useful analysis of this scholastic doctrine in Frank, 'Femina est mas occasionatus. Deutung und Folgerungen bei Thomas von Aquin.'

²⁴ The first part was written some decades earlier by Guillaume de Lorris. Several editions are available, among which F. Lecoy, 3 vols., Paris, 1965–1970, and J. Dufournet, Paris, 1984 (coll. 'Folio').

²⁵ Critical edition of both texts by A.G. van Hamel, Paris, 1892–1905.

²⁶ On Christine de Pisan see Macleod, *The Order of the Rose. The Life and Ideas of Christine de Pisan*. Editions of the text in Curnow, *The 'Livre de la Cité des Dames' of Christine de Pisan: A Critical Edition*, part 2, and Moreau-Hicks, Paris, 1986. Macleod, pp. 62–76, provides a survey of the Debate on the *Roman de la Rose*. He also gives a general account, pp. 120–132, of the content of the *Cité des Dames*; more detailed observations on this work Curnow, part 1, and Wisman, *L'humanisme dans l'œuvre de Christine de Pisan*.

²⁷ Curnow, pp. 62 ff.

defense of women.²⁸ In Spain, the defense of women was taken up around the middle of the fifteenth century by the court poet and prose author Juan Rodríguez del Padrón (or de la Cámara), in his prose writing *Triunfo de las doñas*, which comprises the enumeration of fifty reasons why women are superior to men.²⁹ This writing was also translated into French in 1460 by Fernando de Lucena.³⁰

3. *Note concerning the modern scholarship on De nobilitate et praecellentia foeminei sexus*

In modern scholarship, *De nobilitate et praecellentia foeminei sexus* has always been studied in the context of the medieval and Renaissance scholarly and literary tradition of writings for and against women. This approach has given rise to a certain ambivalence in the appreciation of Agrippa's treatise, because the Renaissance debate for and against women is, to quote the author of an excellent analysis of the terms of the debate, 'an amalgam of genres, arguments, appeals to textual authority and rehearsal of examples of historical women; both established writers and obscure provincials contribute to it; it is characterized by the use of what were known as 'probable' arguments which might have been inspired by deep personal conviction, but might also reflect a delight in paradox for its own sake.'³¹ Thus, Telle saw Agrippa's treatise as a mediocre adaptation, even as mere plagiarism of Rodríguez's work.³² Since Telle argues that the entire body of medieval literature on women after the *Roman de la Rose*, with the exception of Christine de Pisan's work, consists of literary set pieces

²⁸ See the analysis in Piaget, *Martin le Franc, prévôt de Lausanne*.

²⁹ See on Rodríguez two articles by Lida de Malkiel (see bibliography) and Gilderman, Juan Rodríguez de la Cámara. Text of the *Triunfo de las doñas* in J. Rodríguez de la Cámara, *Obras*, pp. 83–127.

³⁰ Telle, p. 51, note 18 and Antonioli, introduction, pp. 21–22. The French translation is included in Rodríguez' *Obras*, pp. 319–368. Antonioli, introduction, pp. 23–25, cites the beginning line of each of the fifty reasons listed by Rodríguez.

³¹ Maclean, review of C. Jordan, *Renaissance Feminism: Literary Texts and Political Models*, Ithaca-London, 1990, in: *Renaissance Quarterly* 47 (1994), p. 215. Maclean's own analysis is *The Renaissance Notion of Woman. A Study in the Features of Scholasticism and Medieval Science in European Intellectual Life*. See also our remarks on the seventeenth and eighteenth-century translations of *De nobilitate et praecellentia foeminei sexus* (chapter 5, pp. 164–165) and the literature cited in chapter 5, p. 166, note 30.

³² Telle, pp. 51–53 and note 18. Antonioli, pp. 21–22, shared this view and suggested that Agrippa probably consulted Rodríguez's work in the French translation.

and lacks seriousness (even though the writings resemble scholarly treatises, since they make use of syllogisms, examples, citations and so on),³³ he also assumes that *De nobilitate et praecellentia foeminei sexus* was conceived by the author and read by the contemporary public as a paradoxical mock encomium.³⁴ Indeed Telle states that Agrippa called his own work a mock encomium ('paradoxe') in the dedicatory letter to Maximilianus, but this view rests on a misapprehension caused by the fact that Telle did not consult Agrippa's own Latin text of the passage in question, but rather the French 1726 translation.³⁵ The eighteenth-century translator, S. de Gueudeville, indeed embraced the then currently held opinion that Agrippa's *De incertitudine* and *De nobilitate et praecellentia foeminei sexus* are insincere paradoxes;³⁶ he defines the latter treatise as 'un sophisme pitoïable et qui se détruit par soi-même'.³⁷ He confirms this interpretation of the discourse by translating as 'paradoxe' the Latin word 'causa,' which Agrippa used to refer to his treatise.³⁸ It is thus clear that Telle's view of *De nobilitate et praecellentia foeminei sexus* was visibly influenced by the biased notion that Agrippa was a sophist whose declamations must not be taken seriously, a view which, as we showed in chapter 5, was common from the time of Tahureau onward. Telle's position can also be compared with that of Prost, who states that *De nobilitate et praecellentia foeminei sexus* is a paradoxical encomium.³⁹

In more recent times scholars have tried to move beyond this traditional view of *De nobilitate et praecellentia foeminei sexus* as a literary

³³ Telle, pp. 24–26, 36–37.

³⁴ Telle, p. 46 ('ce paradoxe,—exercice de rhétorique très en faveur au XVI^e siècle'); p. 53 ('Mais personne alors ne le prenait au sérieux').

³⁵ Telle, p. 46, note 5.

³⁶ *Sur la noblesse & l'excellence du sexe féminin etc.*, vol. 1, 'Préface du traducteur,' fol. *4^r.

³⁷ 'Préface du traducteur,' fol. *6^r.

³⁸ Agrippa wrote in the dedicatory letter to Maximilianus: 'Speroque futurum me huius causae, quod viris foeminas praetulerim, facile veniam obtenturum qui tantae principi haec scripserim, . . .' [I hope that it will be easy for me to plead excuse for this argument, that I preferred women to men, since I wrote it for such an illustrious princess] (*Collected Treatises*, fol. A ij^v). Gueudeville translated this as follows: 'De plus, si j'ai mis le Beau Sexe au dessus du nôtre, j'espère que le public me fera grace, en faveur de l'Auguste Princesse, à l'honneur de qui j'ai avancé un si grand Paradoxe, . . .' (*Sur la noblesse et excellence du sexe féminin*, vol. 1, pp. 30–31). Gueudeville's translation of *De incertitudine* is not a literal rendering, but a free adaptation (*Sur la noblesse, l'excellence du sexe féminin*, vol. 1, 'Préface l'auteur', fols. *5^{r-v}), and the translation of *De nobilitate et praecellentia foeminei sexus* offers a shortened version of the Latin text (see *Sur la noblesse et excellence du sexe féminin*, vol. 1, p. 25).

³⁹ 'Une amplification de rhétorique à la mode du temps' (vol. 1, p. 161).

trifle. Authors such as Angenot, Antonioli, Dhavernas, Gandillac and Newman have stressed the philosophical gravity of Agrippa's treatise.⁴⁰ In spite of these efforts to appreciate the more profound meaning of *De nobilitate et praecellentia foeminei sexus*, its interpretation remains ambivalent today: the status of the treatise as a declamation, that is, a text which seems to present itself as a school exercise offering inductive, probable arguments, continues to be interpreted either as a sign of ambiguity or simply of the author's lack of seriousness.⁴¹

4. *Theological focus of De nobilitate et praecellentia foeminei sexus*

We shall now offer a detailed analysis of the structure and content of *De nobilitate et praecellentia foeminei sexus*, so as to illustrate how this treatise is not a literary set piece rehearsing stock ideas, but a theological treatise in which the author presents his own controversial interpretation of an important Biblical text, namely the Creation in Genesis. Agrippa's interpretation is controversial, because it opposes on all grounds (divine, legal, natural, historical) the dominating tradition of misogyny in Christian theology.

More precisely, it will become evident that the form of reasoning developed in the treatise follows the principles which Agrippa himself defined for theological discourse. In the pertinent statements included in the dedicatory letter to Princess Margaret, and in the introduction and the conclusion of the treatise itself (all three dis-

⁴⁰ Angenot, p. 30; Antonioli, introduction, pp. 29–38; Antonioli, 'L'image de la femme dans le *De nobilitate et pra(e)cellentia foeminei sexus* d' H.C. Agrippa'. Dhavernas's remarks in *De nobilitate et praecellentia foeminei sexus* (transl. 1726), préface, pp. 7–22; Gandillac, 'Sur le rôle du féminin dans la théologie d'Agrippa de Nettesheim'; Newman, 'Renaissance Feminism and Esoteric Theology'.

⁴¹ See, e.g., Kelso, *Doctrine for the Lady of the Renaissance*, p. 21; Angenot's remarks on the bombastic nature inherent in the genre of epideictic oratory, pp. 151 ff. (Conclusion, section 'Pratique de l'argumentation et genre littéraire'); Maclean's views on the rhetorical and paradoxical nature of *De nobilitate foeminei sexus* (*The Renaissance Notion of Women*, pp. 80, 91 and 114, note 18). To support his view, Maclean, following Screech, 'Rabelais, de Billon and Erasmus,' p. 246, refers to a passage from chapter 42 of Agrippa's *Apologia*, whose context (discussed in detail in our chapter 4) he has completely neglected. Maclean's views are referred to by Newman, 'Renaissance Feminism and Esoteric Theology,' pp. 338–339. Gössmann, *Ob die Weiber Menschen seyn, oder nicht?*, pp. 12; 16–17; id., 'Wie könnte Frauenforschung im Rahmen der katholischen Kirche aussehen?', p. 18. Woodbridge, *Women and the English Renaissance*, p. 42, who says that Agrippa's writing is 'a graphic demonstration of the absurdities one must resort to if one claims superiority for either sex'.

cussed above in chapter 3), Agrippa unequivocally explains that his treatise is not a standard epideictic essay in which facts are sacrificed to praise, but a serious argumentation presenting a series of relevant arguments and testimonies to prove that his point of view concerning the matter at hand is a convincing one. Simultaneously, Agrippa emphasizes that his argumentation is not exhaustive, and he thus makes clear that he looks forward to a scholarly exchange of views on the matter. These statements of the author's intention will form the starting-point of our reading and interpretation of the text as a serious theological discourse.

Furthermore, the detailed presentation of the content of *De nobilitate et praecellentia foeminei sexus* will show that the treatise forms part of the author's more or less systematic exposition of his theological ideas. Agrippa's point is that Scripture proves, if its profound meaning is understood correctly, that God created woman, in physical and psychological respects, as a more noble creature than man; numerous legal, natural and historical observations serve to confirm this interpretation of the Bible. The practical consequence to be drawn from this purely theoretical point, namely the observation that in Christian society women are undeservedly discriminated against, is formulated briefly by Agrippa at the conclusion of his treatise, but it does not form the main point of the treatise. In this context, it is interesting to note that several points of this treatise are developed more in detail in Agrippa's later treatises. More specifically, the view that Eve is not responsible for Original Sin is developed in *De originali peccato*; the idea that procreation is a duty enforced on mankind by God, and several aspects of Agrippa's humanistic perception of the Biblical teaching on the relation between man and woman within marriage are developed in *De sacramento matrimonii*. These connections between the different treatises contribute to our understanding of *De nobilitate et praecellentia foeminei sexus* as a part of Agrippa's theological thinking, and they are not intended by the author as a contribution to a literary debate or a defense of radical changes in society in favor of women.

5. *The originality of De nobilitate et praecellentia foeminei sexus*

Although it is true that many of Agrippa's testimonies, taken from classical and medieval theological sources, and from scientific and belletristic literature on women, are not new (indeed, how could they

have been?), Agrippa is not merely rehearsing stock arguments taken from the medieval literary debate for and against women. In this context, a brief word must be said about the similarities between Agrippa's treatise and the *Triunfo de las doñas* of Rodríguez de la Cámara. Telle's statement, that Agrippa simply copied Rodríguez, is unacceptable, because Agrippa's treatise is much less superficial than Rodríguez's work, since Agrippa offers Biblical exegesis and presents cabbalistic and scientific proofs which are lacking in Rodríguez.⁴² Moreover, Agrippa's frequent use of juridical sources, specially from the body of canon law, which are completely lacking in Rodríguez's work, show that Agrippa's approach is far more scholarly (that is, theological) than that of Rodríguez. Moreover, there exist unmistakable structural and conceptual differences between the two works. Rodríguez's work consists simply of a list of fifty reasons to argue why women are superior to men, often supported by citations or references to authorities subdivided into three categories: divine, natural and human.⁴³ Agrippa's treatise, on the other hand, is clearly organized around one central idea, namely his interpretation of the myth of the Creation, and the materials are chosen to prove the correctness of that idea. On the conceptual level, the Neoplatonic influence is more conspicuous in Agrippa's treatise than in Rodríguez's. Thus, the use of cabbalistic sources to interpret the profound meaning of the names Adam and Eve is lacking in Rodríguez. Furthermore, Rodríguez underpins the argument that woman is the concluding element in the Creation with the scientific observation that the higher forms of being were created after the lower forms of being,⁴⁴ whereas Agrippa bases the same argument on a Neoplatonic foundation. Similarly, Agrippa explains the argument of woman's beauty in Neoplatonic terms, while Rodríguez refers to a passage from Aristotle's 'Naturaleza de los animales.'⁴⁵ In short, although it is likely, considering Agrippa's phenomenal erudition, that he knew Rodríguez's text, and although it is possible that he derived some material from him, it is clear that Agrippa is presenting his own views on the matter.

⁴² This point *contra* Telle has already been made: Angenot, p. 30.

⁴³ Antonioli, introduction, p. 22; Rodríguez de la Cámara, p. 121.

⁴⁴ Rodríguez de la Cámara, pp. 88-89.

⁴⁵ Rodríguez de la Cámara, pp. 89-90.

6. *The speech on Neoplatonic love and De nobilitate et praecellentia foeminei sexus*

Agrippa's speech on Neoplatonic love, probably written before 1515,⁴⁶ contains a few thoughts which help us understand more clearly the Neoplatonic background of *De nobilitate et praecellentia foeminei sexus*. In this lecture, Agrippa praises love. He stresses that love is divine, because, as he argues in Neoplatonic fashion, that which induces love is always the brightness of God's face reflected in created things. Accordingly, Agrippa argues that it is a mistake to utilize the notion of love to denote attraction of a purely physical kind, specially sexuality. Instead, Agrippa argues by means of testimonies from ancient historians, poets and philosophers, that love should be seen as the driving force behind all the positive forces in men, namely temperance ('temperantia'), moral bravery ('fortitudo'), justice ('iustitia') and wisdom ('prudentia'). The speech concludes with a call to the audience to embrace love such as has been described in the body of the speech. When Agrippa describes what this entails in practice, he mentions the feminine sex prominently, and announces his *De nobilitate et praecellentia foeminei sexus*:

Hortor igitur vos nunc et admoneo, ut amorem, rem profecto divinam, totis viribus amplectemini. Amemus igitur omnes, amemus inprimis Deum, post Deum uxoris amor rebus omnibus anteponatur. Amemus patriam, pro qua semper viri sapientissimi et sanctissimi multo periculo, multos labores, etiam mortem ipsam libenter impigreque susceperunt. Amemus principem, iustitiae tutorem, amemus parentes, cognatos, benefactores. Amemus nos mutuo, hoc enim prae caeteris praecepit Christus in Evangelio, dicens: hoc est praeceptum meum, ut diligatis invicem. Amemus omnes quotquot sumus nobilissimum foemineum sexum, a quo omne nostrum esse, omnisque nostri generis propagatio et conservatio (quod alias brevi perituum esset) omnisque familia et respublica dependet: quod neque Romani urbis conditorem latuit, qui quum foeminis careret, cum Sabinis atrocissimum bellum suscipere non formidavit: cognovit enim, imperium hoc quod moliebatur, si mulieres non adessent, minime duraturum. Verum de mulierum praecellentia et nobilitate nolumus latius evagari, quia specialem de his libellum daturi sumus. (*Collected Orations*, fol. B i^v; *Opera*, pp. 1085–1086)

⁴⁶ See on the date of this lecture above, chapter 1, p. 22.

I advise you now, and warn you, that you must embrace love, that utterly divine thing, with all your strength. So let us all love, let us love specially God, and subsequently, let the love for our wives be given preference to everything else. Let us love our nation, for which the most wise and upright men always provide, willingly and enthusiastically, many perilous efforts and even face death. Let us love the sovereign, the protector of justice, let us love our parents and our relatives, who are our benefactors. Let us love each other, for this is what Christ teaches us most of all in the Gospel, saying: 'This is my commandment: love one another' (John 15, 12). Let all of us, as many as we are, love the most noble feminine sex, from which depends totally our entire being and the reproduction and preservation of our race (which would otherwise vanish shortly), as well as each family and every state. This the founder of Rome knew very well, and, when there was a shortage of women, he did not hesitate to begin a ferocious war with the Sabines. For he knew that the empire that he was undertaking to found would not stand a chance of surviving if there were no women. But I do not want to dwell on the excellence and nobility of the feminine sex, because I am going to publish a special study of this topic.

This passage is additionally interesting because it suggests that Agrippa's theologically motivated feminism was also inspired by the claims of nature and society against those of the Church. This point is developed in the following sentence in a very topical manner, by putting on the stage the figure of the lecherous monk as the typical representative of the tradition of misogyny in the Church:

Adversabitur istis forte aliquis tristis tetricus hypocrita, et rugosae frontis incurvicervicus cucullio, qui dum Curios simulat, Bacchanalia vivit, et de castitate loquens, clunes agitat, dicetque me vobis falsa dogmata concinere, docili ingenio vestro scandalum ponere, piis auribus offendiculo esse, vitia praecipere, turpes mores docere, sacra cum prophanis confundere, amorem carnalem a divino distinguere: producet exempla, amore collapsos Adam, Samsonem, Loth, David et Salomonem, Nessum, Phaonem, Medeam atque Didonem. (*Collected Orations*, fol. B i^v; *Opera*, p. 1086)

These thoughts will perhaps be opposed by some harsh and gloomy hypocrite, I mean some stiff-necked monk with an austere brow, who feigns to be like the Curii, but lives a feast of Bacchus and, while speaking about chastity, is fornicating all the time. He will tell me that I herald false teachings to you, and that I scandalize your docile minds,

give offence to pious ears, impose sin, teach bad morals, consider as equivalent the sacred and profane, distinguish human love from divine love, and he will produce examples of people who have been destroyed by love: Adam, Samson, Lot, David and Salomon, Nessus, Phaon, Medea and Dido.

In a short refutation of the monk's arguments, Agrippa repeats his earlier point that all love is divine in origin, and that the evil which can result from carnal love does not stem from the depravity of the loved one (*in casu*, the woman), but from the one who loves (*in casu*, the man), who in his depravity does not know how to love in a proper way. As long as the created things are loved not for their own sake, but as images of God, so Agrippa concludes, love for them cannot be wicked. These thoughts will recur in our discussion of *De sacramento matrimonii*.

7. *The structure and content of De nobilitate et praecellentia foeminei sexus*

We shall now describe in detail the structure and content of *De nobilitate et praecellentia foeminei sexus*. An effort has been made to identify the sources which Agrippa used to collect enough illustrations and testimonies to convince the reader that his reading of the Creation in Genesis is correct. The process of identifying sources has been somewhat facilitated by the numerous (albeit incomplete by modern standards) source references included in the margin of the first edition (*Collected Treatises*, fols. A 4^r–C 8^v), and reproduced in part in *Opera*, pp. 504–535.⁴⁷ However, it has been impossible to verify whether Agrippa consulted a particular source directly or rather via an intermediary source, e.g. a *florilegium*, or a work by a predecessor, e.g. Rodríguez de la Cámara's *Triunfo de las doñas* or Boccaccio's *De claris mulieribus*. The identification of sources has also been facilitated by consulting the notes provided by Dubourg,⁴⁸ Antonioli,⁴⁹ Jungmayr and

⁴⁷ When we mention these marginal notes in the following pages, we refer only to the *Collected Treatises*.

⁴⁸ B. Dubourg, ed., *De la supériorité des femmes* (1509).

⁴⁹ Antonioli et al., eds, *De nobilitate et praecellentia foeminei sexus*.

Rabil.⁵⁰ Finally, the modern translations of Dubourg, Bertrand,⁵¹ Antonioli and Rabil were consulted, as well as the older translations of Herold(t) (1540), the anonymous translation of 1537 (which was published for the second time in 1726 and reprinted, with modernized spelling and punctuation, in 1990),⁵² and the anonymous translation of 1736 (reprinted in 1987).⁵³

The structure of *De nobilitate et praecellentia foeminei sexus* can be schematically presented as follows:

1. Introduction and main thesis (*Collected Treatises*, fols. A 4^r 'Deus optimus maximus'—A 4^v 'ostensum est'; *Opera*, p. 504; Antonioli, p. 49, l. 1–22).

2. Argumentation:

The argumentation consists of five main arguments ('rationes'), namely the meaning of the name or 'nomen,' the order, place and material of creation, defined together as 'res,' and the functions and merits or 'munia et merita.' In the sections 'nomen' and 'res,' Agrippa explains that the story of Creation proves, if its profound meaning is understood correctly, that woman is the noblest creation of God, and he adduces proofs from history and natural science to confirm his interpretation of the Creation. In the section 'munia et merita,' he discusses a large amount of Biblical and other historical evidence to argue that, throughout the ages, women have been responsible for all the positive things in society, whereas men have been responsible for all the bad things.

2. a. The 'nomen'

First argument ('ratio'): the meaning of the name. Adam means 'earth'; Eve means 'life.' The cabbala explains that the Hebrew word for 'woman' bears more resemblance to the Holy Tetragrammaton than the word for 'man' (*Collected Treatises*, fols. A 4^v 'Principio

⁵⁰ Jungmayr wrote explanatory notes to the 1540 German translation by Herold ('*Vom Adel und Fürtrefften weiblichen Geschlechts*'), reprinted in Gössmann, ed., *Ob die Weiber Menschen seyn, oder nicht?*, pp. 53–95 (text); 340–359 (notes). A. Rabil, Jr., ed., *Declamation on the Nobility and Preeminence of the Female Sex*.

⁵¹ Bertrand, 'Grandeur et suprématie des femmes, Manifeste féministe d'Henri-Corneille Agrippa de Nettesheym.'

⁵² Dhavernas, ed., *Discours abrégé sur la noblesse et l'excellence du sexe féminin, de sa prééminence sur l'autre sexe et du sacrement du mariage, 1537*.

⁵³ Kimmerle, ed., *Von dem Vorzug und der Fürtrefflichkeit des weiblichen Geschlechts vor dem männlichen*.

itaque'—A 5^v 'quam ut hic adscribi conveniat'; *Opera*, pp. 504–506; Antonioli, pp. 50, l. 1–52, l. 15).

2. b. The 'res' (*Collected Treatises*, fols. A 5^v 'Nos interim excellentiam'—B 7^v 'impossibile est nasci femellam'; *Opera*, pp. 506–522; Antonioli, pp. 52, l. 15–71, l. 17).

2. b. 1. Second argument ('ratio'): the order of creation. The analysis of Genesis shows that the creation of woman is the crowning act of the creation (*Collected Treatises*, fols. A 5^v 'Nos interim excellentiam'—A 6^v 'Dominus dilexit eam'; *Opera*, pp. 506–508; Antonioli, pp. 52, l. 15–54, l. 2).

2. b. 2. Third argument ('ratio'): the place of creation. Woman was created in paradise, as opposed to man. The effects of the preeminence caused by the place of creation are manifold; as proofs, numerous facts from natural history are listed and authoritative statements from Roman and canon law are cited (*Collected Treatises*, fols. A 6^v 'Quantum etiam ratione loci'—A 7^r 'potest esse aliquid boni'; *Opera*, p. 508; Antonioli, p. 54, l. 2–20).

2. b. 3. Fourth argument ('ratio'): the material of creation. Man was created by nature, woman was created by God. As a consequence, women are more beautiful and more dignified than men (*Collected Treatises*, fols. A 7^r 'Nunc ad alia pergamus'—B 7^v 'impossibile est nasci femellam'; *Opera*, pp. 508–522; Antonioli, pp. 55, l. 1–71, l. 17).

2. b. 3. 1. The beauty of woman. Proof: examples from Greek mythology; the Bible; martyrology; the Virgin Mary (*Collected Treatises*, fols. A 7^r 'Nam quum pulchritudo ipsa'—B 1^r 'e captivis sibi deligere in coniugem'; *Opera*, pp. 509–512; Antonioli, pp. 55, l. 14–59, l. 8).

2. b. 3. 2. The dignity of woman. Proof: a. observations from the sphere of natural science and medicine; b. observations drawn from Biblical sources, namely in order to refute the Aristotelian thesis that women are by nature inferior to men (*Collected Treatises*, fols. B 1^r 'Praeter hanc admirandam pulchritudinem'—B 7^v 'impossibile est nasci femellam'; *Opera*, pp. 512–522; Antonioli, pp. 59, l. 8–71, l. 17).

2. c. the 'munia et merita.'

Fifth argument ('ratio'): the functions and merits. God, religion, nature and ancient laws and customs have granted greater dignity to women than to men; women have contributed substantially to the formation of our civilization. Proof: a variety of historical observations adduced from Biblical, mythological, classical and juridical sources (*Collected Treatises*, fols. B 7^v 'Praeterea sexus huius excellentia'—C 7^r 'iudicium faciunt'; *Opera*, pp. 522–533; Antonioli, pp. 71, l. 18–87, l. 5).

3. Conclusion: a polemical thesis: the undeserved and sacrilegious oppression of women by law and customs (*Collected Treatises*, fols. C 7^r 'Sed virorum nimia tyrannide'—C 8^v 'hic illius finis esto'; *Opera*, pp. 533–535; Antonioli, pp. 87, l. 5–89, l. 15).

* * * *

1. Introduction and main thesis (*Collected Treatises*, fols. A 4^r 'Deus optimus maximus'—A 4^v 'ostensum est'; *Opera*, p. 504; Antonioli, p. 49, l. 1–22).

Agrippa sets out with the thought that God (whose androgyny is referred to by means of a quotation from the *Asclepius*)⁵⁴ created man and woman equal: their soul is the same, their mind is the same, their ability to speak is the same, and they both aspire to salvation. He also stresses that the Gospel promises that after the Resurrection, the gender differences will have disappeared and man and woman will both be like angels; a note in the margin refers to three relevant testimonies; Luke 20, 35–36; Mark 12, 25; Matthew 22, 30.

Apart from the essential equality on the level of the divinity of their souls, woman surpasses man in all 'earthly' respects. This thesis, Agrippa announces, will be proved by means of testimonies from authoritative sources, by historical evidence, and by Biblical and legal testimonies.

⁵⁴ 'Utriusque sexus foecunditate plenissimus' [completely full of the fertility of both sexes] (*Asclepius*, 20–21; Copenhaver, ed., *Hermetica*, pp. 78–79).

2. Argumentation

2. a. The 'nomen.'

First argument ('ratio'): the meaning of the name (*Collected Treatises*, fols. A 4^v 'Principio itaque'—A 5^v 'quam ut hic adscribi conveniat'; *Opera*, pp. 504–506; Antonioli, pp. 50, l. 1–52, l. 15).

The treatise is focussed upon the Biblical story of creation (Genesis 1–3). Agrippa first briefly argues that the Hebrew etymology of the names Adam and Eve (meaning *earth* and *life* respectively) proves the superiority of woman. The strength of this argument lies for Agrippa in the conviction, developed at length in *De occulta philosophia*, 1, 70, that the essence of things is expressed in their names, because the creator knew the essence of the things he was creating before naming them. In order to show that argumentation *a nomine* is common, Agrippa refers to several Biblical and legal texts which express the idea that the name of a thing reflects its essence.⁵⁵ In order to underscore the validity of his first argument, Agrippa points out that in law, the literal meaning or the interpretation or the etymology of a word is frequently used as an argument.⁵⁶

After these methodological remarks, Agrippa discusses a passage in a treatise by pseudo-Cyprian, in which it is argued that the name of Adam denotes his essential superiority over Eve.⁵⁷ Agrippa correctly refutes this point of view⁵⁸, and he quotes the authority of cabbalistic sources which use the etymology of the names of Adam

⁵⁵ Testimonies referred to in a margin note, fol. A 4^v: Hebrews 1, 4 ('as far superior to the angels as the name he [i.e. Christ] has inherited is more excellent than theirs'); Philippians 2, 9 ('Because of this, God greatly exalted him and bestowed on him [i.e. Christ] the name that is above every name'). Legal texts: Nov. 15 and Inst. 2, 7, 1; Agrippa borrowed the words 'aperte rerum significativa' [sc. nomina] from Justinianus's preface to Nov. 15).

⁵⁶ 'Sic enim in iure arguimus a nominis interpretatione, item a vi verbi atque vocabuli, insuper et ab etymologia nominis et a nominis ratione' [Thus, in law, we argue on the basis of the interpretation of a name, and on the basis of the meaning of a verb or a noun, and also on the basis of the etymology of a name and of what a name means] (*Collected Treatises*, fol. A 5^r; *Opera*, p. 505, Antonioli, p. 51, l. 5–7). Agrippa provides the following examples in the margin: C. 16 q. 1 c. 5; C. 24 q. 1 c. 33; De pen. D. 3 c. 1; Dig. 50, 16, 180; C. 29 q. 1, par. 1; Cod. 1, 3, 26; Cod. 1, 28, 1; X 4. 2. 3; X 3. 5. 16; In VI^o l. 6. 17, in medio (the relevance of this example is not clear); C. 12 q. 1 c. 5; D. 21 c. 1; Dig. 9, 2, 51.

⁵⁷ Pseudo-Cyprian, *De montibus Sina et Sion, adversus Judaeos*, 4 (Patrologia Latina, vol. 4, 992–994).

⁵⁸ See the note in the *Patrologia Latina* edition ad loc.

and Eve to argue the superiority of Eve to Adam. These sources show, according to Agrippa, that the name of Eve has more affinity with the tetragram expressing the essence of God than the name of Adam, the letters of which correspond neither in shape nor in number to the divine tetragram.⁵⁹

This brief examination concludes the first section. In the remaining part of the treatise Agrippa focuses on what he calls the 'ipsae res' (the actual facts) and the 'munia meritaque' (functions and merits).⁶⁰ In the section covering the actual facts, he discusses relevant aspects of the account of the Creation in Genesis, namely the time of Eve's creation, the place of her creation and the material from which she was created. In the section concerning the functions and merits, he accumulates illustrations for the thesis that Adam is responsible for Original Sin, thus opposing the traditional viewpoint that it was Eve who first sinned against God's command.

2. b. The 'res' (*Collected Treatises*, fols. A 5^v 'Nos interim excellentiam'—B 7^v 'impossibile est nasci femellam'; *Opera*, pp. 506–522; Antonioli, pp. 52, l. 15–71, l. 17).

2. b. 1. Second argument ('ratio'): the order of creation (*Collected Treatises*, fols. A 5^v 'Nos interim excellentiam'—A 6^v 'Dominus dilexit eam'; *Opera*, pp. 506–508; Antonioli, pp. 52, l. 15–54, l. 2).

This section is dominated by the common Neoplatonic idea that the world is a perfect circle. Against the background of this notion, Agrippa argues that the structure of the story of the Creation in Genesis 1 and 2, 1 proves that God had elected woman as the last, necessarily perfect link to round off the Creation. Agrippa explains this interpretation by referring to a passage from the Book of Sirach (Ecclesiasticus), in which it is said that God had already chosen this role for the woman before the beginning of the Creation.⁶¹ This Biblical proof is

⁵⁹ See the notes in Antonioli, p. 52, l. 9–10, and Dubourg, p. 84, n. 12.

⁶⁰ 'Nos interim excellentiam mulieris non a nomine modo, sed a rebus ipsis ac muniis meritisque investigabimus' [But we shall investigate the excellence of woman not only on the basis of the name, but also on the basis of the actual facts and her functions and merits] (*Collected Treatises*, fol. A 5^v; *Opera*, p. 506; Antonioli, p. 52, l. 15–16).

⁶¹ '... sicut de illa scriptum est per Prophetam: antequam coeli crearentur, elegit eam Deus, et praelegit eam' [As has been written about her by the prophet: before the heavens were created, God chose her and preferred her] (*Collected Treatises*, fol. A 6^v; *Opera*, p. 507; Antonioli, p. 53, l. 21–22). Agrippa is possibly referring to

moreover supported with a scientific argument, namely the theory of Aristotle that things in nature come to be not as a necessary product of the materials from which they are made (as was the common theory in Aristotle's time), but for the end which the maker has in mind.⁶² Agrippa concludes this section with the observation that this argument proves that woman must be honored as the most noble of God's creatures, an obligation which he also finds literally expressed in the Bible: 'She adds to nobility the splendor of companionship with God; even the Lord of all loved her' (Wisdom 8, 3).⁶³

2. b. 2. Third argument ('ratio'): the place of creation (*Collected Treatises*, fols. A 6^v 'Quantum etiam ratione loci'—A 7^r 'potest esse aliquid boni'; *Opera*, p. 508; Antonioli, p. 54, l. 2–20).

Next, the superiority of woman is argued on the basis of the fact that God gave woman a more honorable place in the Creation, because she was created within paradise, whereas man was created outside of paradise.

The validity of this argument is documented by two observations. The first stems from the domain of physics. Agrippa points out that the height of the place of creation literally lent itself to two distinct natural qualities of women: they do not suffer from fear of heights as men do, and they are better at swimming than men, whose heavy bodies sink easily.⁶⁴ Secondly, Agrippa refers to the general rule in

Sirach (Ecclesiasticus) 24, 5, which runs in the Vulgate: 'primogenita (sc. sapientia) ante omnem creaturam' (wisdom, the first among all creatures) and 14: 'Ab initio et ante saecula creata sum' [I have been created at the very beginning, before the ages started]. He identifies divine wisdom with woman; see for this identification Benz, 'Gottfried Arnolds "Geheimnis der göttlichen Sophia" und seine Stellung in der christlichen Sophienlehre,' specially p. 71. In the course of this section, Agrippa mentions Augustine, *De genesi ad litteram*, 7 (ed. I. Zycha, CSEL, vol. 28, part 1, pp. 200–228), who argues that the soul of the protoplast was created together with the angels.

⁶² A marginal note, fol. A 6^v, refers to Aristotle, *Physics*, II, 9 (200 a ff.). Aristotle uses, among other things, the example of the saw to illustrate his point: a saw is such as it is, not because it is made of iron, but because it was designed to perform a given task. Agrippa formulates the theory by means of current scholastic terminology: 'Ea siquidem est pervulgata philosophantium, ut illorum verbis utar, sententia finem semper priorem esse in intentione, et in executione postremum' [This is the common opinion among philosophers, to use their words: the goal is always first realized in the mind, and last in the enactment].

⁶³ In this quotation, Agrippa substitutes 'illius' (sc. sapientiae) with 'mulieris', thus stressing his identification of the divine Sophia with Eve.

⁶⁴ Compare Rodríguez de la Cámara, reason 39 (pp. 113–114, French version, p. 356). Concerning the fear of heights, Rodríguez refers to Ambrosius, *Hexameron*, but it is unclear which passage he has in mind.

human and animal society, confirmed by practical experience, that prominence or baseness of origin determines influence in the community. He then argues that customs and laws, both civil and canon, confirm the validity of this rule in human society.⁶⁵ Agrippa refers to two Biblical testimonies, which illustrate, in his view, the belief that the dignity or merit of a person depends on the place of origin. The two testimonies are Genesis 28, 1–2 and John 1, 46 ('Can anything good come from Nazareth?') The relevance of the second testimony speaks for itself; concerning the first testimony, Agrippa explains that Isaac's commandment that his son Jacob should not marry a woman from Canaan, but one from Mesopotamia, was motivated by the consideration that Mesopotamia was a more fertile country.⁶⁶

2. b. 3. Fourth argument ('ratio'): the material of creation (*Collected Treatises*, fols. A 7^r 'Nunc ad alia pergamus'—B 7^v 'impossibile est nasci femellam'; *Opera*, pp. 508–522; Antonioli, pp. 55, l. 1–71, l. 17).

The main idea developed in this section is that woman is more noble than man because she was created from pure and animated material, whereas man was created from dust. In addition, Agrippa remarks that man's creation was, to a certain extent, a natural process analogous to the creation of other living creatures in nature, whereas the creation of woman from man's rib was purely an act of divine will. According to Agrippa, the special quality of woman is materialized in daily existence in two different ways. First, women are more beautiful and pure than men; secondly, they are more dignified than men. Each of these aspects is discussed separately.

2. b. 3. 1. The beauty of women (*Collected Treatises*, fols. A 7^r 'Nam quum pulchritudo ipsa'—B 1^r 'e captivis sibi deligere in coniugem'; *Opera*, pp. 509–512; Antonioli, pp. 55, l. 14–59, l. 8).

Agrippa defines beauty as the physical expression of the divine light reflected in the essence of things:

⁶⁵ Two relevant laws are referred to in a marginal note, fol. A 6^v, namely Dig. 21, 1, 31, 21 and D. 24 (*in margine* 22) c. 5.

⁶⁶ 'Quocirca Isaac praecepit filio suo Iacob ne uxorem acciperet de terra Canaan, sed de Mesopotamia Syriae conditione meliore' [Thus, Isaac ordered his son Jacob not to marry a Canaanite woman, but to marry one from Mesopotamia, in Syria, because it is a more fertile land] (*Collected Treatises*, fol. A 7^r, *Opera*, p. 508; Antonioli, p. 54, l. 16–18).

Nam quum pulchritudo ipsa nihil est aliud quam divini vultus atque luminis splendor rebus insitus, per corpora formosa relucens . . . (*Collected Treatises*, fols. A 7^{r-v}; *Opera*, p. 509; Antonioli, p. 55, l. 14–16)

For since beauty is nothing else but the splendor of God's face which exists in created things, and is reflected in beautiful bodies . . .

This definition coincides almost exactly with the definition of beauty in the *Oration on Platonic Love*, where it serves to claim that the true object of love, even if it seems to be directed toward a physical object, is by definition the divinity:

Pulchritudo autem omnis, sive incorporea sive corporea sit, nihil aliud est, quam divini vultus splendor in rebus creatis relucens. (*Collected Orations*, fol. A iij^v; *Opera*, p. 1076)

All beauty, whether it is spiritual or physical, is nothing but the splendor of God's face reflected in created things.

A portrait of the ideal beauty and grace of woman then serves to illustrate how divine grace finds its purest expression in the female body. Antonioli rightly stresses that this portrait displays the standard elements of beauty as expressed in Renaissance poetry and painting, as well as other Neoplatonic criteria for beauty, such as symmetry and ideal proportions.⁶⁷ But Agrippa immediately gives this ideal portrait a theological implication by amplifying it with a significant number of Old Testament passages where the physical attractiveness of women is specifically mentioned (namely Sarah, Rebecca, Abigail, Bathsheba, Abishag, Queen Vashti, Esther, Judith, Susanna and the three daughters of Job).⁶⁸ He also mentions that the martyrs described in the various accounts of martyrdom were without exception beautiful women. The argument is rounded off with the remark that God himself honors beauty, citing as an illustration the proverbial beauty of the Virgin Mary, attested in numerous Biblical passages.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Antonioli, p. 55, note at line 17. Agrippa also discusses the physical beauty of women in *De occulta philosophia*, 2, 27.

⁶⁸ Agrippa speaks of and quotes from Genesis 6, 2; 12, 11–14; 24, 1–27; 1 Samuel 25, 3; 1 Samuel 25, 35; 1 Samuel 25, 39–43; 2 Samuel 11, 26–27; 1 Kings 1, 1–4; Esther 1, 9–22; 2; Judith 8, 7; 10, 4 and 7; Daniel 13, 31; Job 42, 15. Several of these references are given in a marginal note, fols. A 8^{r-v}. Before discussing these Biblical examples, Agrippa mentions in parentheses several women from Greek mythology who had a love affair with one or other god: Daphne, the daughter of Salmoeneus (Tyro), Hebe, Iole and Omphale.

⁶⁹ Additionally, Agrippa refers to Numbers 31, 17–18, where Moses orders the

2. b. 3. 2. The dignity of woman (*Collected Treatises*, fols. B 1^r 'Praeter hanc admirandam pulchritudinem'—B 7^v 'impossibile est nasci femellam'; *Opera*, pp. 512–522; Antonioli, pp. 59, l. 8–71, l. 17).

The discussion of this topic is divided into two parts. First, Agrippa gathers arguments for the dignity of woman from the point of view of her natural gifts; second, the dignity of women is argued on the basis of testimonies from the Bible.

(a) Agrippa lists a variety of observations concerning the female body, sometimes supported by testimonies, interpreted as illustrations of her dignity. All the observations are drawn from the sphere of natural science and medicine (*Collected Treatises*, fols. B 1^r–B 4^r; *Opera*, pp. 512–516; Antonioli, pp. 59, l. 8–64, l. 21).

In a general section, Agrippa lists a number of characteristics of the female body. He mentions that women have only as much hair as is needed to cover the shameful parts of their body (i.e., the genital organs)⁷⁰ and that, contrary to men, they do not need to touch their genitals when they urinate.⁷¹ The innate modesty of women is furthermore demonstrated by the fact that when they are ill, they oftentimes prefer to die, rather than expose their body to the examination and treatment of a physician. Women even retain their modesty in death, because women's corpses float on their faces, whereas men's corpses float on their backs. This observation and its interpretation are drawn, as Agrippa mentions himself, from Pliny the Elder (7, 17).⁷² Several other physical characteristics of women serve as additional illustrations. Two are based on the notion that the head and specially the face is the most noble part of the human body. Here, the differences between men and women underscore the pre-eminence of women: the appearance of women is not disfigured by baldness; the growth of a beard makes the faces of men resemble

generals of his army, after the victory over Midian, to kill all boys and women, but to spare the girls and virgins, and Deuteronomy 21, 11, where it is said that the Law allows man to marry a pretty woman who is a prisoner of war. The source references are added in a marginal note, fol. B 1^r.

⁷⁰ Compare Rodríguez de la Cámara, reason 14, who argues somewhat differently by saying that the pubic hair of women covers the genitals completely, whereas the pubic hair of men does not (p. 92, French version, p. 337).

⁷¹ Compare Rodríguez de la Cámara, who refers to Aristotle ('el antiguo Filosofo'; 'lanchien philosophe') in this context (p. 92; French version, p. 337).

⁷² Levinus Lemnius confirmed Pliny's observation and supports it with scientific data (*Occulta naturae miracula* [...], I, 6; ed. Antwerp, 1564, fols. 132^v–134^v).

animals, while women's faces never lose their purity.⁷³ In this context, Agrippa refers to the testimony of Pliny the Elder (11, 37, 58), who reports that the Laws of the Twelve Tables prohibited women from shaving lest they lose their sense of purity, since the cheeks indicate man's sense of shame.⁷⁴ Another illustration of woman's innate purity as opposed to man's natural uncleanness, is the fact that a man's bathwater is always dirty, whereas a woman leaves the water clear.⁷⁵ A similar demonstration is the fact that the waste matter of the body leaves the female body discreetly, through the menstrual flow, whereas it leaves the male body by way of the mouth and nostrils ('per faciem'). Finally, since human beings are the only creatures standing on two legs and reaching with their face to the sky, it is a special favor to women that when they fall, they usually fall backward, not on their face. This last point is a development of a common theme among ancient and humanist authors, namely the *status erectus* of man.⁷⁶

Next, Agrippa draws a few illustrations from the dominant role of women in procreation. Following a medical theory of Galenus and Avicenna, Agrippa points out that 'female semen' is mainly responsible for conception, male semen being nothing more than an accessory element.⁷⁷ He adds several observations concerning the relationship between children and their parents, which illustrate that the bond between child and mother is stronger than between child and father: children usually inherit the good characteristics of their mother and the bad ones of their father; mothers usually love their children more than fathers; children respect their father but truly love their mother. Finally, Agrippa presents in this context some scientific observations concerning the remarkable quality of breast milk. He remarks that breast milk is not only a nutrient for infants, but can also be used as a means to cure sick people and even in certain cases to save healthy

⁷³ Compare Rodríguez de la Cámara, who says that the beard is a sign to remind men of the impure material from which the first man was created (reason 14, p. 92; French version, p. 338).

⁷⁴ The reference to the pertinent chapter in Pliny is added in Herold(t)'s 1540 translation, p. 67. See also Cicero, *De legibus*, 2, 23. The law in question was a prohibition against scratching the cheeks, as a sign of mourning, not against shaving.

⁷⁵ See Rodríguez de la Cámara, reason 6 (p. 90; French version, p. 335).

⁷⁶ A marginal note (fol. B 2^r) refers to a classical source for this theme: Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 1, 85–86.

⁷⁷ Galenus, 2, *de spermate*, and 14, *de utilitate particularum*. Avicenna, *Liber canonis*, liber 1, fen. 1, doctrina 5; consulted in ed. Venice, 1507, repr. Hildesheim, 1964, fols. 7^v–8^r. The sources are identified in the margin, fol. B 2^r.

adults from starvation. To illustrate this point, he refers to the story of a young woman who breast-fed her incarcerated mother, related by Valerius Maximus in the section 'piety toward parents, brothers and sisters, and the homeland' (5, 4, 7).⁷⁸ In connection with this story, woman's natural inclination to piety and compassion is also briefly discussed. To verify this point, Agrippa refers to Aristotle,⁷⁹ and to those verses of the Book of Sirach (Ecclesiasticus) devoted to the choice of a good wife.⁸⁰ In this connection he mentions finally the testimony of ancient medical authors, who write that the warmth of women's breasts restores youthful vigor in old men; he observes, referring to 1 Kings 1, 1–4 (King David and Abishag), that this knowledge already existed in the days of the Old Testament.⁸¹

Agrippa then returns at length to the preponderant role of women in what he calls the 'sacrum illud generandi officium' [that sacred duty of procreation].⁸² The following additional scientific proofs are discussed. First, women are sexually mature at an earlier age than men.⁸³ Furthermore, their fertility is such that they can conceive again very soon after the delivery of a child, and sometimes become pregnant without actually having intercourse.⁸⁴ Finally, Agrippa mentions a biological characteristic of pregnant women which is commonly described in contemporary medical handbooks, namely their irregular appetite and, therefore, their ability to digest raw meat and fish, and even stone or metal.⁸⁵

⁷⁸ The chapter reference is added in the margin, fol. B 2^v.

⁷⁹ *Historia animalium*, 9, 1 (608 a 11 ff.) The reference is added in the margin, fol. B 2^v.

⁸⁰ Sirach (Ecclesiasticus) 36, 18–28; Agrippa cites verse 27: 'a man with no wife becomes a homeless wanderer.' The reference is added in the margin, fol. B 2^v.

⁸¹ The reference is added in the margin, fol. B 2^v.

⁸² *Collected Treatises*, fol. B 3^r; *Opera*, p. 514; Antonioli, p. 62, l. 11. Earlier, Agrippa had stated that the divine law ('lex') has given to women as their main task to produce offspring (fol. B 2^v; *Opera*, p. 513; Antonioli, pp. 60, l. 18–61, l. 3).

⁸³ A possible source is Aristotle, *Historia Animalium*, 7, 1 (582 a 15–30).

⁸⁴ Agrippa refers to the case of a woman who became pregnant by sitting in a bath in which men had ejaculated. This case is described by Averroes in his medical handbook *Colliget libri* 7, book 2 (consulted in the edition published as volume 10 of *Aristotelis Opera cum Averrois commentariis*, Venice, 1562, [repr. Frankfurt a.M., 1962], fol. 22^v). The reference to Averroes is added in the margin, fol. B 3^r.

⁸⁵ The deviant appetite in men and women is called *malacia* or *pica*. This phenomenon is described in the medical handbooks until at least the seventeenth century. A parallel for Agrippa's observation is provided by the physician Zaccharias: 'Peior earum [sc. mulierum] conditio est, in quibus humores naturalem statum longe praetergressi, terram, carbonem, cretam, calcem, glaciem, stuppam, crudos pisces, aut carnes, et absurdiora quaedam expetere eas cogunt, ita ut nonnisi risu excipi aliquando possint huiusmodi praegnantium appetitus' [Worse is the condition of women, whom

Agrippa then lists some additional extraordinary characteristics of the female body discussed in the medical and philosophical literature: the curative force of menstrual blood,⁸⁶ the ability of the female body to convalesce without a physician's aid, and parthenogenesis. This last phenomenon occurs among certain animals (namely vultures and horses), a point concerning which Agrippa refers to Origen and Vergil.⁸⁷ Agrippa stresses that among human beings this miraculous event has only happened to the Virgin Mary. In this context he challenges the belief among Moslems that conception through the spirit is a common thing.⁸⁸ Finally, Agrippa mentions that muteness practically never occurs among women. This argument is particularly relevant in the context of the notion that the gift of speech is the greatest treasure of human beings, and the only thing which distinguishes them from brute animals, a conception which Agrippa illustrates with testimonies from Hesiod and the *Corpus Hermeticum*.⁸⁹

(b) After these scientific testimonies, a number of testimonies from religious sources demonstrating women's dignity are discussed (*Collected Treatises*, fols. B 4^r–B 7^v; *Opera*, pp. 516–522; Antonioli, pp. 64, l. 22–71, l. 17). Two main points are made. First, the Bible (specially

the humors, having by far surpassed the natural state in them, force to want to eat dirt, coals, chalk, limestone, tow, raw fish or meat and several even more absurd things, so that one sometimes cannot but laugh when hearing about the appetite of pregnant women in this manner] (J. Zaccharias, *Quaestionum medico-legalium tomi tres*, Venice, 1737, vol. 1, p. 54; lib. 1, tit. 3, qu. 2, n. 13). Similar testimonies are recorded in the popular *De secretis mulierum libellus* by pseudo-Albertus Magnus (ed. Lyon, 1582, fol. M 2^v), and in Levinus Lemnius's *Occulta naturae miracula* (. . .), book 1, chapter 5 (ed. Antwerp, 1564, pp. 20–22). See for more references Zedler's *Universal-Lexikon* s.v. *pica*.

⁸⁶ A possible classical source is Pliny the Elder, 7, 13, 63 and 28, 23, 77–86. Agrippa discusses the topic also in *De occulta philosophia*, 1, 42. Popular belief in the miraculous force of menstrual blood was widespread; see, e.g. *Handwörterbuch des deutschen Aberglaubens*, index s.v. Blut, Menstruation.

⁸⁷ Origen, *Contra Celsum* 1, 37 (*Sources Chrétiennes*, vol. 132). In this passage proof is advanced that the Immaculate Conception was not contrary to nature. Both in the main text and in the margin (*Collected Treatises*, fol. B 3^v), Agrippa erroneously refers to this work as *Contra Faustum*. Agrippa quotes Vergil, *Georgica* 3, 273–275 (*Collected Treatises*, fol. B 4^r; *Opera*, p. 517; Antonioli, p. 64, l. 10–13), where the theory of the impregnation of mares by the wind is described, a feature which is also recorded in the scientific literature of the ancients; see, e.g., Aristotle, *Historia animalium* 5, 5 (541 a 27–31; and see the note ad loc. in the Loeb edition, ed. A.L. Peck, 1970); 6, 18 (572 a 13–14); Pliny the Elder, 8, 67, 166; Columella, 6, 27, 3 ff.

⁸⁸ Agrippa records that the Turks say that certain islands exist where women become pregnant by the wind; the children of these women are called *nefesogli* (compare *De occulta philosophia*, 3, 36).

⁸⁹ Agrippa cites Hesiod, *Theogonia*, 81–84; 96–97; *Corpus Hermeticum* 12, 12. The reference to the *Corpus Hermeticum* is added in the margin, fol. B 4^r.

the Old Testament) shows that in human life after the Fall, women constitute God's blessing on mankind, whereas men are a curse due to Adam's responsibility for the Fall. Second, Agrippa uses a wide variety of Biblical testimonies to refute the Aristotelian thesis that women are by nature inferior to men.

Several Biblical, specially Old Testament, testimonies are discussed to reveal how man was blessed on account of his partnership with woman.⁹⁰ From these, Agrippa deduces that God prescribes that each man should love his wife. The list of Biblical testimonies continues with the observation that the Mosaic law was imposed on human kind because it was Adam, not Eve, who transgressed God's command.⁹¹ Agrippa extensively explains his interpretation of this part of the story of Creation. His view is that God had forbidden Adam, not Eve, from eating from the tree of knowledge; Adam sinned while knowing better, Eve sinned from ignorance, having been misled by the serpent. Consequently, man is responsible for the introduction of death and sin into this world, and it is through our father, not our mother, that we are tainted with Original Sin. A series of observations, partially containing interpretations of Biblical passages, is presented to confirm this view. Male circumcision is explained by Agrippa in this context.⁹² He also observes that God did not punish Eve because she had eaten from the tree (that is, because she had transgressed his command), but because she had imprudently, under the temptation of the devil, given Adam the opportunity to sin. In other words, Adam sinned intentionally, Eve went astray involuntarily ('Vir itaque

⁹⁰ The following sources are identified in the margin, fols. B 4^{r-v}: Proverbs 18, 22 ('He who finds a wife finds happiness; it is a favor he receives from the Lord'); Sirach (Ecclesiasticus) 26, 1 ('Happy the husband of a good wife, twice-lengthened are his days'); 26, 15 ('Choicest of blessings is a modest wife'); Proverbs 12, 4 ('A worthy wife is the crown of her husband'); 1 Corinthians 11, 7 ('woman is the glory of man'; Agrippa gives a subsidiary reference to Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 12, 22); Genesis 17, 5 ('No longer shall you be called Abram; your name shall be Abraham, for I am making you the father of a host of nations') and Genesis 27 (benediction of Esau as a result of the efforts of his mother). According to a cabbalistic interpretation referred to by Agrippa, God's blessing of Abraham by giving him Sarah as his wife is represented by the insertion of the letter 'h', the last letter of Sarah's name, into Abraham's name. This list of illustrations concludes with the general remark that more examples could be given; a marginal reference to Genesis 28 supports this statement (see for Genesis 28 p. 204 above).

⁹¹ A marginal note, fol. B 4^v, refers the reader to the relevant text, namely Genesis 2.

⁹² A marginal note, fol. B 4^v, refers the reader to the pertinent text, namely Genesis 17.

ex certa scientia peccavit, mulier erravit ignorans, et decepta').⁹³ Agrippa also remarks in this context that Eve was tempted by the devil, because she was the nobler creature; this observation is supported by an unidentified citation from Bernard of Clairvaux.⁹⁴ Furthermore, Agrippa explains that it was in view of man's guilt that Christ assumed the nature of a man to expiate sin from this world. This relation between Adam and Christ also explains why the Church has restricted the priesthood, as the formal representation of Christ, and why there is a canon in Church law claiming that women are not created in the image of God.⁹⁵

On the other hand, Agrippa argues on the basis of Genesis 3, 15: 'He will strike at your head, while you strike at his heel,'⁹⁶ that women are the medium through which sin is redeemed in this world. In this context, Agrippa underscores that it was on account of women that Christ is called the son of man ('filius hominis'); according to Agrippa, Jeremiah 31, 22: 'the woman must encompass the man with devotion,' confirms that the world is saved thanks to woman.⁹⁷ Agrippa also underpins his interpretation of Genesis 3, 15 with the observation that the resurrected Jesus appeared first to women, not to men.⁹⁸ Mentioning the New Testament, Agrippa inserts a few additional testimonies which show that at the crucial moments of Christ's suffering

⁹³ *Collected Treatises*, fol. B 5^r; *Opera*, p. 517; Antonioli, p. 66, l. 8–9. A marginal note identifies the relevant text, namely Genesis 3. This thought must be seen against the background of Agrippa's allegorical interpretation of the original sin in *De originali peccato*.

⁹⁴ 'Videns diabolus admirandam eius pulchritudinem, sciens eam talem qualem antea in divino lumine cognoverat, quae super omnes angelos gauderet colloquio Dei, invidiam iecit in solam mulierem propter suam excellentiam' [The devil, seeing the admirable beauty of woman, knowing that she was just as he had known her previously in the divine light, as she enjoyed the conversation with God, sitting above all the angels, became disgusted with her solely on the basis of her excellence] (*Collected Treatises*, fol. B 5^r; *Opera*, pp. 517–518; Antonioli, p. 66, l. 11–14). Jungmayr, p. 347, note 98, refers to Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermo* 66, 3, 301 (*Opera*, VI, 1 [*Sermones*, vol. 3], Rome, 1970).

⁹⁵ C. 33 q. 5 c. 13. The source reference is given in the margin, fol. B 5^r. Compare Rodríguez de la Cámara, 26th reason, p. 107; French version, pp. 350–351. The reference to the *Decretum Gratiani* is not given by Rodríguez de la Cámara.

⁹⁶ The source reference is added in the margin, fol. B 5^r.

⁹⁷ This passage from Jeremiah is corrupt in the original, and the Vulgate translation is vague and uncertain. Agrippa possibly follows St. Jerome, who interprets this line as an announcement of Jesus's birth from the Virgin Mary (*Commentaria in Jeremiam prophetam* 6, 31; ed. S. Reiter, CSEL, vol. 59, pp. 397–398). The source reference is added in the margin, fol. B 5^r.

⁹⁸ A marginal note, fol. B 5^r, refers the reader to John 20, 1–18 and Mark 16, 1–11. See also Matthew 28, 1–10 and Luke 24, 1–12.

and death, men forsook Him, while women supported Him and stood by their faith.⁹⁹ Finally, Agrippa observes that heresies have always been caused by men and that theologians commonly agree that during the critical period immediately after Christ's death, the Church survived thanks to the Virgin Mary.

Agrippa continues with a detailed refutation of Aristotle, who claims in *Historia animalium* 9, 1 (608 a 11 ff.), among other things, that men are always stronger, wiser and more balanced than women. Though the argumentation is subtle here, it constitutes by no means a negation of Agrippa's own thesis. Agrippa counters Aristotle's scientific argument with observations from the Bible showing that women can outsmart and defeat men. His refutation is introduced by a quotation from 1 Corinthians 1, 27: 'Rather, God chose the foolish of the world to shame the wise, and God chose the weak of the world to shame the strong.'¹⁰⁰ St. Paul's remark in its turn is illustrated with a number of Biblical examples, whose sources are mentioned in the margin of the *Collected Treatises*: Eve humiliated Adam (Genesis 3, 17–19), Samson's wife was responsible for the death of her husband (Judges 14 and 16); Lot, the paragon of the chaste man, was nevertheless seduced into adultery (Genesis 19, 30–38); David's wife threw doubt into the heart of her hitherto relentlessly faithful husband (2 Samuel 11); the wise Solomon was outwitted by his wife (1 Kings 11); Job's wife incited her otherwise resigned husband to be angry and curse (Job 2, 9–10; 3); even Christ was contradicted by the woman from Canaan (Matthew 15, 20–28) and Peter was enticed by a woman to disavow Christ (Matthew 26, 69–75; John 18, 47; Mark 14, 66–72; Luke 22, 54–62). Moreover, the Church itself, an infallible institution according to the claim of the canonists,¹⁰¹ was nevertheless misled by the woman who became Pope.¹⁰²

Agrippa realizes that these examples might be judged as contradicting his main thesis regarding the integrity of women. He therefore presents several formal arguments to counter this hypothetical

⁹⁹ As the most prominent examples, Agrippa refers to the betrayal of Peter, the fact that only women escorted Jesus's body from the cross to the tomb, and the fact that even Pilate's wife tried to save Jesus's life. A note in the margin, fol. B 5^v, refers to relevant sources for the last two examples, namely Luke 24, 10 and Matthew 27, 19.

¹⁰⁰ The sources are mentioned in the margin, fol. B 5^v.

¹⁰¹ A marginal note, fol. B 6^r, refers to C. 24 q. 1 c. 9.

¹⁰² Agrippa refers to Pope John VIII, who was believed to have been a woman. The margin, fol. B 6^r, refers to a relevant source, namely B. Platina, *Vitae pontificum*.

objection. First, he proposes the legal argument that all those women who outwitted men acted legitimately in defence of their interests.¹⁰³ Secondly, he again uses the Bible as his authority by mentioning some Old Testament anecdotes involving women who, although known for their slyness or talent for deceit, are nonetheless praised in the Bible: Rachel (Genesis 31, 32–34), Rebecca (Genesis 27; see also 33, 8–16), Rahab (Joshua 2), Jael (Judges 4, 18–21), Judith (Judith 11).¹⁰⁴ He also stresses that Cain, Esau, Uzzah and King Saul were punished for their good behavior,¹⁰⁵ whereas the daughters of Lot and Tamar were excused after they had committed incest.¹⁰⁶ Finally, Agrippa uses an argument derived from Aristotle's rules of logic to counter the hypothetical objection and to drive home the point made in this entire section, namely that women are more noble than men: he observes that, since the noblest woman, the Virgin Mary, exceeds in nobility the noblest man, John the Baptist, the female gender exceeds in nobility the male gender as a whole. On the other hand, since the most scandalous person belongs to the male gender (namely either Judas¹⁰⁷ or some future Antichrist who will be the incarnation of the devil),¹⁰⁸ the male sex is inferior to the female. Two examples from the animal kingdom are given to confirm this last point: the noblest of birds, the eagle, and the phoenix, that remarkable Egyptian bird, are always female, whereas that most poisonous of animals, the snake called 'basiliscus,' is always male.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰³ Agrippa paraphrases a decretal letter by Pope Innocent III, who wrote to a certain cardinal: 'Si te vel me confundi oporteat, potius te confundi eligam' [If either you or I must be thrown into confusion, I prefer that you be the victim] (X 1. 8. 3, as indicated in a marginal note, fol. B 6^v). Agrippa also refers to the Roman Lex Aquilia which, according to Agrippa, allowed women to 'consulere damno alieno' [compensate for someone else's loss]; a marginal note refers to Dig. 9, 2, 49, but it is not clear to which passage Agrippa is referring here.

¹⁰⁴ The source references (except Judges 4) are indicated in the margin, fol. B 6^v.

¹⁰⁵ Genesis 4, 3 (Cain); Genesis 27, 3–4 (Esau); 2 Samuel 6, 3–7 (Uzzah); 1 Samuel 15 (King Saul). This section is lacking in the *Collected Treatises*, fol. B 6^v, and appears for the first time in the *Collected Treatises* of 1532.

¹⁰⁶ Genesis 19, 37–38 (the daughters of Lot); Genesis 38, 11 ff. (Tamar).

¹⁰⁷ Agrippa quotes Jesus's words about Judas, mentioned in Mark 14, 21; the source reference is given in the margin, fol. B 7^r.

¹⁰⁸ Compare Rodríguez de la Cámara, reason 36 (p. 111; French version, p. 355).

¹⁰⁹ Agrippa probably refers to the perception of these animals in art and heraldry. The eagle is always feminine in heraldry (see Dubourg, p. 88, note 95), the basilisk was represented as a creature half-snake half-cock (see also Jungmayr, p. 349, note 139); the phoenix is feminine in the Egyptian language ('Bennu', see Dubourg, p. 88, note 96).

2. c. The 'munia et merita.'

Fifth argument ('ratio'): the functions and merits (*Collected Treatises*, fols. B 7^v 'Praeterea sexus huius excellentia'—C 7^r 'iudicium faciunt'; *Opera*, pp. 522–533; Antonioli, pp. 71, l. 18–87, l. 5).

Agrippa once more returns to his starting-point (marked by means of the pertinent source reference in the margin of the *Collected Treatises*), namely the interpretation of the Fall as related in Genesis 3. Referring to 1 Corinthians 15, 22 ('For just as in Adam all die', etc.), he maintains that Adam, not Eve, is responsible for the Fall:

Praeterea sexus huius excellentia probitasque ac innocentia vel his argumentis satis abunde ostendi potest, quoniam malorum omnium ortus a viris sit, a mulieribus minime. Primus quippe protoplastes Adam ille legem Domini transgredi ausus, portas caeli observavit et omnes nos peccato mortique reddidit obnoxios. Omnes enim peccavimus et morimur in Adam, non in Eva. (*Collected Treatises*, fol. B 7^v; *Opera*, p. 522; Antonioli, p. 71, l. 18–23)

Furthermore, the excellence, integrity and purity of this sex can also be abundantly demonstrated by the following arguments, since the origin of all evil comes from men, not at all from women. For the protoplast man, Adam, was the first who dared to transgress the law of the Lord, Who closed the gate of heaven and made us all sinners and subjected us all to death. For we have all sinned and we all die in Adam, not in Eve.

This thesis, which he had argued by means of Biblical (mainly Old Testament) exegesis in section B. 3. 2. b., is now illustrated by a detailed analysis of the position of women in society. Throughout this section, Agrippa advances the general, bipolar idea that men are responsible for moral decay, whereas women are by nature virtuous, and have furthermore bestowed many benefits on mankind. As in the previous sections, he cites Biblical sources in combination with profane sources.

To illustrate the innate wickedness of men, Agrippa reviews Old Testament history and determines that men have always been the first trespassers of moral laws: Cain was the first envious person, murderer and person to lose faith in God's mercy (Genesis 4, 1 ff.), Lamech was the first bigamist (Genesis 4, 19), Noah was the first drunkard (Genesis 9, 21), Hamus, Noah's son, was the first person to reveal the shame of his father (Genesis 9, 22), Nimrod was the first

tyrant (Genesis 10, 8–9), Lot was the first adulterer and perpetrator of incest (Genesis 19, 31 ff.). The sons of Jacob were the first to sell their brother (Genesis 37); the Egyptian King was the first to kill young children (Exodus 1); men were the first who displayed morally depraved behaviour, as the downfall of the cities of Sodom and Gomorra illustrates (Genesis 18–19).¹¹⁰ Agrippa furthermore stresses that countless Old Testament men had, in addition to their wives, concubines to satisfy their lust.¹¹¹ On the other hand, Agrippa emphasizes the chastity of Old Testament women: their sexual activity was merely directed to the production of offspring; with the exception of Bathsheba (1 Kings 1–2), they all had only one husband; those who were widowed did not remarry if they already had children; those who were infertile refrained from sexual intercourse and allowed their husbands to produce offspring with another woman.¹¹²

These Biblical examples are amplified with examples from secular history. Agrippa observes that the chaste behavior of widows and infertile women had also become established among the Greeks, as the legislation of Lycurgus and Solon shows.¹¹³ A long enumeration of exemplary wives and chaste, upright women in Greek and Roman history and mythology, partially borrowed from the catalog of honorable women among the Greeks, Romans and other pagan peoples in Jerome's *Contra Jovinianum*, serves as additional illustration. Among exemplary wives, we find: Abigail, the wife of Nabal, Artemisia, the wife of King Mausolus (Jerome, *Contra Jovinianum*, 1, 43 [Patrologia Latina, vol. 23, 286]; see also Gellius, *Noctes Atticae*, 10, 18), Argia, the wife of the Theban Polinices, who helped Polinices's sister Antigone to bury his body against the orders of Creon, the ruler of Thebes (Statius, *Thebais* 12, 296 ff.), Julia, the wife of Pompey, Porcia, the daughter of Cato (Jerome, *Contra Jovinianum*, 1, 46, mentions that Porcia committed suicide when she heard of the death of her second husband, Brutus; see also Valerius Maximus, 4, 6, 5), Cornelia, the wife of Gracchus (see Valerius Maximus, 7, 1), Messalina, the wife

¹¹⁰ The margin, fols. B 7^v–B 8^r, refers to the relevant sources.

¹¹¹ Agrippa mentions Lamech, Abraham, Jacob, Esau, Joseph, Moses, Samson, Elkanah, Saul, David, Salomon, Ashhur, Rehoboa, Abijah, Caleb and Ahasverus.

¹¹² As examples of infertile women, Agrippa mentions Sara (Genesis 16, 2), Rachel (Genesis 30, 3) and Lea (Genesis 30, 9). The margin, fol. B 8^r, contains the relevant source references.

¹¹³ The classical sources are Plutarch, *Vita Lycurgi*, 15, 12 and *Vita Solonis*, 20, 2–3.

of Sulpitius (source unclear), Alcestis, the wife of Admetus (see Euripides's *Alcestis*), Hypsicratea, the wife of Mithridates (see Valerius Maximus, 6, Ext. 2), Dido and Lucretia (both are mentioned among the exemplary Roman women by Jerome, *Contra Jovinianum*, 1, 43 and 46 [Patrologia Latina, 23, 286–287]; additional sources Vergil, *Aeneid*, book 4 for Dido, and Livy, 1, 57–59 for Lucretia), and finally Sulpitia, wife of Lentulus (Valerius Maximus, 6, 7, 3). As examples of chaste women, we find: Atalanta, Camilla, Iphigenia, Cassandra, Chryseis and the Vestal Virgin Claudia; these women are mentioned as Roman models of virginity by Jerome in *Contra Jovinianum*, 1, 41 (Patrologia Latina, vol. 23, 282–283).

Agrippa next discusses a few examples that could be cited to counter his thesis: Samson, Jason, Deiphobus and Agamemnon had disastrous marriages.¹¹⁴ But Agrippa explains the mischievous deeds of their wives as equitable retaliation. (This thought returns in *De sacramento matrimonii*, when Agrippa observes that bad wives are not born, but made by circumstances.) Agrippa goes on to suggest that the historical accounts concerning these women have been distorted by their male authors; were women allowed to write history, countless tales about male corruption would have been written.¹¹⁵

Agrippa then focuses on the profitable contributions of women to society. First, he observes that women are the inventors of the liberal arts and of virtues. To illustrate this, he remarks that the gender of the nouns denoting the arts and virtues are usually feminine. He additionally observes that the continents Asia, Europa and Lybia (or Africa) are named after women.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ Samson was induced by his wife Delilah to reveal the solution to the riddle (see Judges, 14). Jason was married to Medea. When they lived in Corinth, the monarch Creon wanted to marry his daughter Creusa to Jason. Medea took revenge by poisoning Creusa and murdering her children (see Euripides's *Medea*). Deiphobus, one of the Trojan heroes, was married to Helen. After the sack of Troy, he was murdered by the Greek Menelaus. According to Vergil (*Aeneid*, 6, 495 ff.), it was Helena who handed over Deiphobus to the enemy. Agamemnon was murdered by his wife Clytemnestra in return for the sacrifice of their daughter Iphigenia (see Aeschylus's *Agamemnon*).

¹¹⁵ Compare Rodríguez de la Cámara, who, in the 43rd reason, makes the point that, if women were just as ambitious as men, history would have recorded many more glorious deeds of women (p. 116; French version, p. 358). By way of illustration, Agrippa refers to the criminal activities of men in the times of Joshua and David; the margin, fol. C i^r, provides as references Joshua 7 (the trespass of the Israelites after the capture of Jericho), 2 Samuel 19 (the uprising of Sheba); 2 Samuel 4, 2–3 (mention of captains of bands).

¹¹⁶ Compare Rodríguez de la Cámara, 43rd reason, p. 115; French version, p. 357,

Agrippa next asserts that women have been the first practitioners of every conceivable kind of virtue. This claim is illustrated with many examples, which fall roughly into two different categories. Agrippa first discusses virtues which are in some way related to the Christian faith; here, the majority of examples stems from the Bible. He then discusses virtues in a much broader context, focusing on the excellence of women in various skills; in addition to Biblical cases, a few other examples are also cited.

The first and most important illustration of religious virtue is the Virgin Mary, presented by Agrippa as the first person who opted for a life of abstinence to the honor of God. This brings on a second series of examples among Biblical women of virtuous behavior or steadfast faith, in some cases rewarded with the gift of divine foresight. Agrippa remarks in general that female prophets usually are more strongly inspired with the divine spirit than male prophets, citing as testimonies Lactantius's *Institutiones Divinae* (passim), Eusebius's *Praeparatio evangelica* (9, 15, 1; 10, 11, 27) and Augustine's *De civitate Dei* (possibly 18, 23).¹¹⁷ He then mentions the following examples of female prophets: Maria, sister of Moses (with reference to Exodus 15, 20);¹¹⁸ Huldah (with reference to 2 Kings 22, 14 and 2 Chronicles 34, 22–28); Elizabeth (with reference to Luke 1, 45), Anna (with reference to Luke 2, 36–38), the four daughters of Philippus (with reference to Acts 21, 8–9). Examples of steadfast belief and virtuousness: Judith, Ruth, Esther (to each of whom a whole book is devoted), Sarah (with reference to Genesis 21, 12 and 15, 6),¹¹⁹ Rebecca (with reference to Genesis 25, 23), the widow of Sarepta (with reference to 1 Kings 17, 7–24),¹²⁰ the Samaritan woman (with reference to John 4, 4–41), the Canaanite woman (with references to Matthew 15, 21–28; Mark 7, 24–30), the woman who suffered from bleeding (with

and Boccaccio's *De mulieribus claris*, chapters 9 (on Europa) and 10 (on Lybia), ed. V. Zaccaria, s.l., 1967 (*Tutte le Opere*, ed. V. Branca, vol. 10), pp. 58–62.

¹¹⁷ The sources are mentioned in the margin, fols. C i^{r-v}. Agrippa's general remarks aim at the wide influence of the Sibylline oracles, a collection of prophetic sayings written during the last centuries BCE and the first centuries CE, and frequently cited as testimonies in theological matters by patristic authors; see, e.g. for Lactantius, the index s.v. Sibyllae in CSEL, vol. 27, 2, 2.

¹¹⁸ Agrippa commits an error, because the Vulgate speaks of Maria, sister of Aaron; in the modern translation, the woman's name is Miriam.

¹¹⁹ Agrippa stresses that God spoke to Sarah, not to Abraham, even though Abraham was very steadfast in his belief.

¹²⁰ After this example, Agrippa mentions an example *a contrario*: Zechariah, who became speechless because he did not believe the words of the angel (Luke 1, 20).

references to Matthew 9, 18–26; Mark 5, 21–43; Luke 8, 40–56), Martha, whose faith and confession is compared to that of Peter (with references to John 11, 27 and Matthew 16, 13–23), Mary Magdalene (with references to John 19–20, Matthew 27–28, Luke 23–24) and Priscilla (with reference to Acts 18, 26).¹²¹

Thirdly, Agrippa mentions the readiness of women to become martyrs, for which virtue a Biblical example is also given, namely 2 Maccabees, 7.¹²²

In addition to these three groups of Biblical women, Agrippa names some medieval women who strove for the propagation of Christianity: Theodelinda (d. 627/8), wife of the King of Bavaria, who converted the Langobards; Gisela (c. 985–c. 1060), the sister of Henry I, who converted the Hungarians; Clotilde (or Chrotilde; d. 545), the wife of the Burgundian king Clovis, who converted the Franks,¹²³ and finally an anonymous girl of low birth who converted the Iberians.¹²⁴

In order to remove the last doubts from the reader's mind, Agrippa additionally discusses a number of skills in which women have excelled at least as much as men. The numerous examples, taken both from pagan (mythological and historical) and Christian sources, concern the priesthood,¹²⁵ prophecy,¹²⁶ magic,¹²⁷ philosophy,¹²⁸ and finally eloquence and poetry.¹²⁹

¹²¹ Source references in the margin of the *Collected Treatises*, fol. C 2^r; among the source references is also an irrelevant reference to Luke 7 (possibly 36–50, the anointment of Christ by the woman who was a sinner).

¹²² Source reference in the margin of the *Collected Treatises*, fol. C 2^r.

¹²³ *Collected Treatises*, fol. C 2^r; *Opera*, p. 526, Antonioli, p. 77, l. 10 ff. Agrippa probably knew these references from the vast hagiographic literature. In the standard edition of the Lives of the Saints, the *Acta Sanctorum*, started by J. Bolland in the seventeenth century, Theodelinda is mentioned among the *praetermissi* on January 22 (*Acta Sanctorum Januarii*, vol. 2, Antwerp, 1643, p. 388); Gisela is mentioned among the *praetermissi* on May 7 (*Acta Sanctorum Maji*, vol. 2, Antwerp, 1680, p. 133); Clothilde is discussed in *Acta Sanctorum Junii*, vol. 1, Antwerp, 1645, pp. 292 ff. See also Rodríguez de la Cámara, who mentions Clothilde in reason 35, p. 111; French version, p. 354.

¹²⁴ A possible source is Rufinus, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, 1, 10 (Patrologia Latina, vol. 21, 480–482).

¹²⁵ Mythological examples: Melissa, priestess of Cybele; Melissa became a generic noun for priestesses of Cybele (see Lactantius, *Institutiones Divinarum*, 1, 22). The 'hypekaustria' or priestess of Minerva (see Plutarch, *Quaestiones Graecae*, 3); Maera, priestess of Venus (see Statius, *Thebais* 8, 478); Iphigenia, priestess of Diana (see Euripides, *Iphigenia in Aulis* and *Iphigenia in Tauris*); the famous priestesses of Bacchus, whose various Greek names Agrippa cites, namely thyades, menades, bacchantes, eliades, mimallonides, aedonides, buthyades, bassarides, or triaterides; enumerations such as these occur in surveys like Coelius Rhodiginus, *Antiquae lectiones*, 16, 2. As an example from Jewish history Agrippa mentions, for the second time, the example

Agrippa next argues that nature has equipped women rather than men to be prominent in teaching the arts and sciences. As illustrations, he cites two examples of women who taught their sons, namely Cornelia, the mother of the Gracchi, and the Greek wife of the Scythian King Ariapeithes, who taught Greek to her son Skyles.¹³⁰ He also refers to the testimonies of Plato and Quintilian, who wrote extensively on the choice of governesses for children.¹³¹ (These examples are also mentioned in *De incertitudine*, chapter 3 [on grammar],

of Maria (Miriam), sister of Moses, who was a priestess (see Numbers 12, 14; Exodus 15, 20; see above, note 118, for Agrippa's error concerning this name). As an example from Christian history, Agrippa refers to the woman who became pope, namely Pope John VIII, notwithstanding the exclusion of women from the priesthood; Agrippa had used this woman earlier as an example of the cleverness of women (see above, p. 212).

¹²⁶ Examples of prophetesses from different nations are given: Cassandra and the Sybils, Maria (Miriam), sister of Moses (see Exodus 15, 20; see above, note 118, for Agrippa's error concerning this name), Deborah (see Genesis 35; Judges 5), Huldah (see 2 Samuel 22, 4; 2 Chronicles 34, 22–28), Anna (see Luke 2, 36), Elizabeth (see Luke 1, 41), the four daughters of the evangelist Philipppus (see Acts 21, 9), and two Saints, namely St. Brigid, the widow of the Swedish king and famous mystic (1302/3–1373; see *Acta Sanctorum Septembris*, ed. J. Bolland, vol. 5, Antwerp, 1755, pp. 629–703) and St. Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179; see *Acta Sanctorum Octobris*, vol. 4, ed. J. Bolland, Brussels, 1780, pp. 368–560).

¹²⁷ Circe and Medea are cited as women who have proved the skilfulness of women in magic. Circe is also mentioned as a powerful sorceress in *De occulta philosophia*, 1, 41, where Agrippa mentions Vergil, Lucan, Apuleius and Augustine as sources.

¹²⁸ Examples: Theano, the wife of Pythagoras and Dama, daughter of Pythagoras (see Diogenes Laertius, 8, 42); Aspasia and Diotima, pupils of Socrates (in reality, Aspasia and Diotima were teachers of Socrates; see Plato, *Menexenus*, 235e and *Symposium*, 201d–212b); Lastheneia of Mantinea and Axiothea of Phlius, pupils of Plato (see Diogenes Laertius, 3, 46 and Clemens of Alexandria, *Stromata*, 4, 19, in *Patrologia Graeca*, vol. 8, 1333; Agrippa's text, fol. C 3^r; *Opera*, p. 527; Antonioli, p. 78, l. 15, erroneously reads 'Mantinea ac Philesia Axiochia, ambae discipulae Platonis'); Gemina and Amphiclea, praised by Plotinus (see Porphyry, *Vita Plotini*, 9); Themiste, who is praised by Lactantius (Agrippa refers to *Institutiones Divinae*, 3, 25). Agrippa finally mentions the Christian theologian and philosopher Saint Catherine of Alexandria (see Christine de Pisan, *Le livre de la Cité des Dames*, Part 3, ch. iii, ed. M. Curnow, vol. 2, pp. 978–982) and Zenobia, the learned Queen of Palmyra (267–271/2; see Christine de Pisan, *ibid.*, Part 1, ch. xx, ed. M. Curnow, vol. 2, pp. 701–706).

¹²⁹ Examples: Amesia Androgyne (see Valerius Maximus, 8, 3, 1; Agrippa spells the name as 'Armesia Androginea'), Hortensia (see Valerius Maximus, 8, 3, 3), Lucretia, Valeria (see Pliny the Elder, 7, 16, 15), Copiola (see Pliny the Elder, 7, 48, 49), the poetesses Sappho and Corinna, the writer of epigrams, Cornificia, Erinna (a friend of Sappho; Agrippa spells 'Erimna'), Sempronia (Agrippa refers to Sallust, *Catilina*, 25), Calphurnia, who, as Agrippa mentions, is famous among jurists. As is clear from an entry in R. Estienne, *Dictionarium historicum, geographicum, poeticum* (. . .), ed. Oberursel, 1601, Calphurnia was notorious because she pleaded her own case; this precedent gave cause for an edict prohibiting women from acting as lawyers.

¹³⁰ See for Cornelia Cicero, *Brutus*, 104; 211; Tacitus, *Dialogus*, 28; for Ariapeithes's wife, Herodotus, 4, 78–80. Agrippa spells 'Syles' and 'Aripithes.'

¹³¹ Quintilian, 1, 1, 4–5; Plato, *Republic*, 2, 377c ff.

where Agrippa argues that language is better taught to children in practice by mothers and governesses than by the rules of grammar.) Agrippa stresses in general that women are by nature more intelligent than men. As proof, he mentions that even Socrates learned from a woman, namely Aspasia (whom he had already mentioned as an example of a woman excelling in philosophy) and Apollos from Priscilla.¹³²

Agrippa then continues with some examples of women who have acquired leading positions thanks to their wisdom,¹³³ and subsequently mentions a few women who are known as inventors of useful things,¹³⁴ as founders of cities or empires,¹³⁵ as war heroines and formidable fighters,¹³⁶ referring the reader finally to the collections of relevant

¹³² The source for Priscilla is Acts 18, 24–28, mentioned by Herold(t) in the 1540 German translation (p. 86).

¹³³ Opis, who was elevated to the rank of the gods (Opis is a nymph of Diana; see Vergil, *Aeneid*, 11, 836–867); Plotina, wife of Trajan (see Pliny, *Panegyricus*, 83, 5–8; Cassius Dio, 68, 5, 5), Amalasuntha, wife of the Ostrogoths (see Procopius, 5, 2, 3–5), Aemilia, wife of Scipio (see Valerius Maximus, 6, 7, 1), Delbora, wife of Labiodoth (with a reference to Judges 4, 4–5), Attalia, who reigned seven years over Jerusalem (with references to 2 Samuel 11, 3–4 and 2 Chronicles 22, 12), Semiramis, who reigned after the death of Ninus (see Diodorus Siculus, 2, 4–20); the queens of Ethiopia whose name is Candace (with references to Acts 8, 26–39 and Flavius Josephus; the reference to Flavius Josephus seems to be erroneous, Strabo, 17, 1, 54, is possibly meant), Nicaules, queen of Sheba (with references to 1 Kings 10; 2 Chronicles 9, Matthew 12, 42 and Luke 11, 31). The name Nicaules is borrowed from Flavius Josephus 8, 158, the woman of Tecoa (with a reference to 2 Samuel 14), Abigail (with a reference to 1 Samuel 25), Bathsheba (with a reference to 1 Kings 1, 11 ff.).

¹³⁴ Namely Isis (inventor of the alphabet and of agriculture in Egypt), Minerva (inventor of the olive tree and of art in Greece), Nicostrata (inventor of the alphabet in Rome); the inventions which are cited were added by Herold(t) in the 1540 German translation (p. 87). Compare Boccaccio's *De mulieribus claris*, chapters 8, 6, and 27, where these women are discussed as inventors (ed. V. Zaccaria, s.l., 1967, [*Tutte le Opere*, ed. V. Branca, vol. 10], pp. 54–58, 48–52, 112–120).

¹³⁵ Examples: Semiramis (see above, note 133), Dido, the founder of Carthage (see Vergil, *Aeneid*, book 4), and the Amazons (see Herodotus, 4, 110–117).

¹³⁶ Namely Tomyris, Queen of the Massagetes, who defeated Cyrus, the Persian monarch (see Herodotus, 1, 201–214), Camilla, Queen of the Volsci (see Vergil, *Aeneid*, 7, 803–816 and 11, 498–663) and Valasca, the leader of an army of women who waged war against the tyranny of men in Bohemia during the 8th century (see Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini, *De Bohemorum origine ac gestis historia*, chs. 7 and 8, consulted in ed. Solingen, 1538, pp. 14 ff.). Furthermore, the Amazons are mentioned again, the Pandaeon women (see Pliny the Elder, 6, 76), the women called Candace (see above, note 133), Lemnian women (according to the legend, the women of the island Lemnos killed all the men and elected their King's daughter Hypsipyle to the throne; this legend is part of the myth of the Argonauts; see Valerius Flaccus's *Argonautica* and Statius, *Thebaid*, 5, 49 ff.), Phocian women (see Plutarch, *Bravery of women*, 2; 13), Chian women (see Plutarch, *Bravery of women*, 3) and Persian women (see Plutarch, *Bravery of women*, 5). Among the heroines, Agrippa briefly discusses

examples, among which he specifically mentions the historical works of Plutarch (notably the essay *Bravery of women*, a collection of anecdotes [Stephanus edition, pp. 243–263]), Valerius Maximus,¹³⁷ and Boccaccio's *De claris mulieribus*, a collection of 104 biographies.¹³⁸

Next, Agrippa focuses on ancient laws and customs illustrating how in pagan cultures women were valued at their true worth and not discriminated against by the legal system. As proof, he first presents a host of material from the history of early Rome.¹³⁹ To this are added two testimonies concerning the Persian King Cyrus and the Macedonians,¹⁴⁰ as well as the survey of a large number of legal testimonies which illustrate how in the time of the Roman emperors women were held in great esteem.¹⁴¹ This survey concludes with the

Judith, citing the testimony of Saint Jerome (Agrippa refers to *Praefatio de Judith*; consulted in Jerome's *Opera omnia*, vol. 3, Basel, 1536, p. 22), two nameless women from the Old Testament (with references to 2 Samuel 20, 14–22 and Judges 9), Esther (with reference to Esther 7–9), Veturia, the mother of the Roman general Coriolanus (see Livy, 2, 40; Plutarch, *Vita Coriolani*, 53), Artemisia (Herodotus, 8, 88), and finally Joan of Arc.

¹³⁷ Agrippa probably refers chiefly to books 6, 7 (*De fide uxorum erga viros*) and 8, 3 (*Quae mulieres apud magistratus pro se aut pro aliis causas egerunt*).

¹³⁸ The popularity of this work during the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries is attested by its translations into Spanish, French, German and English; see Wright, *Boccaccio in England: from Chaucer to Tennyson*, p. 28.

¹³⁹ The abduction of the Sabine women by Romulus is explained as motivated by the perception that women are indispensable to found an empire (Agrippa uses this argument also in his academic speech on Neoplatonic love; see the quotation, above, p. 195). Agrippa records that newly founded *curiae* by Romulus received the name of women (see Livy, 1, 13, 6) and that women are not allowed to grind in a mill or cook (source unclear); he also mentions the custom that prescribes the community of property within marriage (*Fontes iuris Romanai antejustiniani*, ed. S. Riccobono, vol. 1 [*leges*], Florence, 1941, p. 7), and the law that prohibits the exchange of gifts between man and wife (see Dig. 24, 1, 1). Agrippa next describes the episode of the women who prevented the soldiers of the Volsci led by Coriolanus from reaching Rome and the ensuing dedication of a temple of Fortuna to these women (see for the episode Livy, 2, 40, and for the dedication of the Temple Plutarch, *Vita Coriolani*, 53). Next, Agrippa mentions that the Roman laws awarded to women a certain number of rights and privileges, namely: women had the right of way as pedestrians (source unclear); women had permission to wear jewelry (a note in the margin refers to Cod. 11, 12, 1; there is one unclear reference in the margin, fol. C 5^v); women were allowed to inherit; it was lawful to deliver official eulogies of women at their funeral. Next, Agrippa mentions the episode of the women who gave their jewelry so as to send a gift to the oracle in Delphi (see Livy, 5, 25).

¹⁴⁰ Cited from Plutarch, *Bravery of women*, 5.

¹⁴¹ Agrippa makes a number of statements in this context (*Collected Essays*, fols. C 6^{r-v}; *Opera*, p. 532; Antonioli, pp. 84–86). (1) He says that Justinian records that he took the advice of his wife before writing laws; a marginal note refers to a relevant source, namely Nov. 8, 1. (2) He paraphrases Cod. 5, 4, 28 (source reference in *margin*), a legal provision concerning marriage, meant to protect the woman.

remark that the ancient legislators Lycurgus and Plato also maintained that women were not inferior to men, and ordained that women must join men in the prescribed physical exercises and efforts related to the waging of war.¹⁴² In addition to the legal testimonies, Agrippa adds a few observations from history, which illustrate that matriarchal cultures or societies which relied heavily on the performance of women were common in the past; he mentions the examples of the Gaetulians, Bactrians and Gallatians; Cantabri, Scythians, Thracians, Gauls and Celts.¹⁴³

(3) He refers to a law which determines that the wife of the emperor is not above the law, but shares her husband's privileges; there is a marginal reference to the relevant source, namely the introduction to Nov. 105, 2, § 3 in medio, a rule stipulating that the wife of a consul must share the marks of honor of her husband. (4) He cites Dig. 1, 3, 31, which determines that the wife of the *princeps* stands, like her husband, above the law. (5) He points out that in some regions prominent women are allowed by custom to administer justice; there is a marginal reference to relevant sources, namely X 1. 43. 4 and Lib. Feud. 2. 3. 2; see *Corpus Iuris Civilis*, ed. Kriegel, vol. 3, p. 852. (6) He records that women have the right to own slaves; there is a marginal reference to the relevant source, Dig. 15, 1, 3, 2. (7) He states that women have the right to administer law among *extranei*; a marginal note refers to C. 2 q. 5 (*in margine* 4) c. 7; C. 12 q. 2 c. 8, which seem to be all irrelevant; there is also an erroneous reference to C. 24 q. 4. (8) He mentions that women have the right to name their sons after their own name; a marginal note refers to Dig. 6, 1, 6 and Dig. 28, 2, 3. (9) He mentions that women have certain rights concerning their dowries; a marginal note refers to relevant sources, namely X 3. 26. 16; X 3. 21. 5; In VI^o 1. 18. 2; Cod. 6, 20, 3; Cod. 2, 3, 15. (10) He mentions that various laws stipulate that women of irreproachable repute may not be put in goal; he stresses that one law even ordains that the judge who violates this rule should go to prison; the relevant sources are indicated in the margin, namely Cod. 1, 48, 1; Nov. 134, 9. (11) He mentions the rule that if a woman commits adultery, she must be placed in a monastery or incarcerated by women, whereas men who commit adultery are put to death; the relevant sources are indicated in the margin, namely C. 32 q. 6 c. 4 and 5; Cod. 9, 9, 29; Nov. 134, 10; this is an example which illustrates the general rule that the laws usually favor women; in the margin, Agrippa gives a source for this general rule, namely Dig. 1, 5, 9, but this source appears to attest the opposite of Agrippa's statement. (12) He refers to several *privilegia* mentioned in modern collections of juridical texts, namely to the section on the *Senatusconsultum Velleianum* in Azo's (d. c. 1230) *Summa*, consulted in *Summa super codicem. Instituta extraordinaria*, repr. Turin, 1966, pp. 136–139, and to the section on *renuntiatio mulieris* in W. Durantis's 13th century *Speculum iuris*, lib. 4, de pactis & transactionibus, par. 2, no. 2, consulted in ed. Basel, 1584, repr. Aalen, 1975, vol. 2, p. 110.

¹⁴² Possible sources: Plutarch, *Lycurgus*, 14, 3–4; Plato, *Laws* 7, 813e; 7, 814b; 7, 829b; 8, 833e ff.; *Republic* 5, 452; 457a ff.

¹⁴³ Among the possible sources, one is certain thanks to a verbatim citation, namely Plutarch, *De mulierum virtutibus*, 6, where Plutarch quotes from the treaty between Hannibal and the Celtic women.

3. Conclusion: the undeserved oppression of women by law and customs (*Collected Treatises*, fols. C 7^r 'Sed virorum nimia tyrannide'—C 8^v 'hic illius finis esto'; *Opera*, pp. 533–535; Antonioli, pp. 87, l. 5–89, l. 15).

Agrippa supplies a brief conclusion, in which a polemical thesis is sharply formulated against the Christian culture of misogyny and the exclusion of women from important activities in society. It is contrary to the law of God and natural law that society, run by men, systematically subdues women through law, customs and education. He specially denounces the legal exclusion of women from public offices and legal action,¹⁴⁴ and their exclusion from the priesthood (to which, Agrippa observes, Scripture has explicitly granted them access).¹⁴⁵ Agrippa blames, for this abuse, the wickedness of men who have made the status of women legally inferior to that of men, thus allowing the customs of men to prevail over the word of God.¹⁴⁶ He explicitly refutes on exegetical grounds those men who justify their oppression of women with Biblical passages such as Genesis 3, 16 ('Yet your urge shall be for your husband, and he shall be your master'); 1 Peter 3, 1 ('Likewise, you wives should be subordinate to your husbands'); Colossians 3, 18 ('Wives, be subordinate to your husbands, as is proper in the Lord'); Ephesians 5, 22 ('Wives should be subordinate to their husbands as to the Lord'); 1 Corinthians 14, 34 ('women should keep silent in the churches'). According to Agrippa, those who appeal to passages such as these in order to despise women and keep them subdued listen only to the surface message of the Bible, and completely misunderstand what it says about women on the level of its profound meaning:

Sed qui noverit varios scripturae tropos eiusdemque affectus, facile cernet haec non nisi in cortice repugnare. Est enim is ordo in ecclesia ut viri praeponantur in ministerio mulieribus, sicut Iudaei Graecis in promissione. Non tamen est acceptor personarum Deus, in Christo enim nec mas, nec femina, sed nova creatura. Quin et pleraque viris propter

¹⁴⁴ Some sources which show this exclusion are indicated in the margin, fol. C 7^v, namely Dig. 50, 17, 2; X 1. 43. 4; C. 3 q. 7 c. 1; C. 33 q. 5 c. 17; Dig. 3, 1, 1, 5 in medio.

¹⁴⁵ As proof, Agrippa quotes Joel 3, 1 ('Your sons and daughters shall prophesy'). Some examples of prophesying women in the New Testament are also repeated: Anna, daughter of Simeon, the four daughters of Philippus and Priscilla; see Luke 2, 36; Acts 21, 9 and 18, 26.

¹⁴⁶ A marginal reference, fol. C 7^v, identifies the relevant source, namely Dig. 1, 5, 9, and the annotation ad loc from the *glossa ordinaria*.

duritiem cordis eorum in mulieres permissa sunt, sicut Iudaeis quondam concessa repudia, quae tamen mulierum dignitati nihil offiunt, quin et deficientibus errantibusque viris mulieres in virorum opprobrium potestatem habent iudicii, et ipsa regina Saba iudicatura est viros Hierusalem. Qui ergo iustificati per fidem effecti sunt filii Abrahae, filii inquam promissionis, subiiciuntur mulieri et obnoxii sunt praecepto Dei ad Abraham inquentis: 'Omnia quaecunque dicit tibi Sara, audi vocem eius.' (*Collected Treatises*, fol. C 8^r; *Opera*, p. 534; Antonioli, pp. 88, l. 14–89, l. 2)

For he who knows the various mystical meanings of the Bible and the feelings which it expresses, will recognize easily that these things [namely the Biblical testimonies just mentioned] oppose my thesis only on the surface. For the hierarchy whereby men are put over women in the ministry indeed exists in the Church, just as the Jews were put before the Greeks with regard to the Covenant. But God is not biased [cp. Acts 10, 34 and Romans 2, 11],¹⁴⁷ for in Christ there exists no man and woman, but a new creature. In fact, men are allowed to do most things against women on account of their brutality, as the Jews were once permitted to repudiate their wives. But these things by no means diminish the dignity of women. Women even have the power to judge, to the disgrace of men, those men who fall and err, and the queen of Sheba will personally judge the men of Jerusalem [1 Kings 10]. But those who by being justified thanks to their faith, have become sons of Abraham, that is, sons of the Covenant, are subject both to their wives and to God's command to Abraham: 'Heed the demands of Sara, no matter what she is asking of you' [Genesis 20, 12].

Finally, Agrippa summarizes the structure of the treatise and repeats the intention of the tract, already outlined in the dedicatory letter to Princess Margaret and in the introduction to the treatise, stressing that his treatise does not represent an empty praise inspired by personal ambition, but a devout search for Biblical truth. He has not aspired to provide an exhaustive treatment of his point of view, and thus invites other theologians to treat the same topic and enrich his work with new material. The formulation of the conclusion in the form of a polemical thesis thus serves unmistakably to encourage further theological debate on the question.

¹⁴⁷ References added in the margin, fol. C 8^r.

CHAPTER SEVEN

DE ORIGINALI PECCATO DISPUTABILIS OPINIONIS DECLAMATIO

1. *Composition and publication of De originali peccato*

Agrippa probably wrote *De originali peccato* immediately after his arrival in Metz in January 1518. As seen in chapter 1, he regularly visited the monastery of his friend Deodatus. During these visits, he held extensive theological discussions with the monks, including, among various topics, his own recently composed dialogue *De homine*, and the subject of Original Sin and the Fall of the Angels. The day after he gave this last talk, Deodatus wrote Agrippa to ask a brief outline of it, because some of the monks had not followed Agrippa's account while others had not entirely understood it:

Hesterna die, doctorum doctissime, cum inter corporales epulas eleganti et sapidissimo intellectus et vitae cibo nos satiaris abundantius, multaque de statu primi hominis ante casum, et de casu angelorum, ornatissimo ac compendioso sermone dissereres, aliqui fratrum nostrorum magis corporis, quam animae refectioni intenti, ea minus attente audiverunt, aliqui insipientius intellexerunt. Quare abs te charitatis affectu humiliter postulo, dum tempus vacat, ea mihi per modum epistolae, ut brevius clariusque fieri poterit, epilogando describas, et si quid ego pro te potero, praecipe, et ego pro viribus mandata tua libenter implebo. (*Epistolae*, 2, 21, n.d., p. 670)

Yesterday, most learned among the scholars, when you gratified us abundantly, during the material meal, with elegant and wise food to the benefit of the intellect and the true life, and presented in a most ornate and concise talk many thoughts on the state of the first man before the fall and the fall of the angels, some of our brothers were not paying enough attention, more concentrated as they were on the refreshment of their body than on that of their soul, while others misunderstood you. Therefore I ask you, most humbly and for the sake of charity, to write down for me in a letter, while you still have time, your thoughts as briefly and as clearly as possible. If there is anything I can do for you, tell me, and I shall willingly fulfill your wishes.

It seems safe to assume that the *Declamatio de originali peccato* was written as a response to this request. Agrippa dedicated his treatise to his old friend Theoderich Wichwael of Caster, who lived in Cologne as prior of the Augustinians, and who was also titular bishop of Cyrene and suffragan bishop of Cologne. The treatise must have been written in great haste, because Agrippa's response to Wichwael's reaction to it dates from February 6, 1518.¹ Wichwael died in 1519.² The treatise appeared in print for the first time in the *Collected Treatises* of 1529.

2. *Brief note concerning De originali peccato in the context of the theological debate on Original Sin*

The problem of Original Sin has always been one of the principal challenges for theologians. The thought that all men participate in the sin of the first man is expressed by St. Paul in his letter to the Romans, chapter 5, 12:

Propterea sicut per unum hominem peccatum in hunc mundum intravit, et per peccatum mors, et ita in omnes homines mors pertransiit, in quo [at first interpreted as a relative pronoun, 'in Adam', later as a causal pronoun, 'inasmuch as'] omnes peccaverunt.³

Therefore, as sin came into this world through one man, and death through sin, so death was passed on to all men, inasmuch as all sinned [in Adam all sinned].

This text has long formed the starting point for Biblical exegetes and theologians to define the nature of Original Sin. The broad notion of *concupiscentia* is unequivocally present in St. Paul's text, but theologians have always disagreed over how Original Sin involved *concupiscentia* in Adam. St. Paul leaves room for two interpretations: on the one hand, the flesh contained an evil force directed against God before Original Sin; and on the other hand, the flesh received this

¹ *Epistolae*, 2, 19, d.d. 6 February 1518, pp. 666–669.

² See for Wichwael, Kunzelmann, *Geschichte der deutschen Augustiner-Eremiten. Vierter Teil*, pp. 47–48, note 173, and Meuthen, *Kölner Universitätsgeschichte. Band 1*, pp. 161–162.

³ See Gross, *Geschichte des Erbsündendogmas. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Problems vom Ursprung des Uebels*. Bd. 1, *Entstehungsgeschichte des Erbsündendogmas*, pp. 53–57.

force as a result of sin. Furthermore, an important topic of discussion is the question of how the transmission of Original Sin should be viewed. Many students, both Church Fathers and scholastic theologians, believed Original Sin was transmitted through sexual lust, a particular form of *concupiscentia*. Some students, notably St. Augustine, believed additionally that *concupiscentia*, in the restricted sense of sexual appetite, is a punishment inflicted on man for Adam's transgression of God's law.⁴ In scholastic theology, it was an issue as to whether *concupiscentia* as the *fomes peccati* is a constituent element of original sin, or whether it is only concomitant to it. Gabriel Biel, a well-known scholastic theologian, wrote toward the end of the fifteenth century in a popular survey of scholastic theology,⁵ that either position is probable, for both are supported in the works of Church Fathers and theologians, and neither is condemned by the Church.⁶

In the dedicatory letter to Wichwael, Agrippa claims that his view on the nature of Original Sin offers what he calls a totally new perspective on the matter (*opinio nova*).⁷ He then defends the indeed unusual view that Original Sin consisted in the act of sexual intercourse

⁴ Gross, p. 370: 'Die sich von Adam her auf seine sämtlichen Nachkommen vererbende Sündenschuld ist nach ihm (Augustinus) nicht anderes als die Konkupiszenz, jene Revolte des Fleisches gegen den Geist, die erstmalig als Straffolge der Auflehnung des Menschengesistes gegen Gott im Sündenfall auftrat, die in der Zeugung wirksam ist und durch letztere von Adam auf alle Menschen übergeht.' See also *ibid.*, pp. 322–328, where Gross shows that St. Augustine argues that *concupiscentia* entered human nature after the transgression of Adam; he also indicates that, generally speaking, St. Augustine takes the terms *concupiscentia*, *lex peccati*, *cupiditas*, *libido*, in the restricted sense of sexual lust, and finally that the Church Father saw sexual lust as something evil, often as a sin in the full sense of the word.

⁵ The *Collectorium in IV libros sententiarum Guillelmi Occam*, Tübingen, 1501, repr. Hildesheim, 1977. See Schrama, 'Gabriel Biel et son entourage: via moderna et devotio moderna', pp. 180–183; note 124 contains a check-list of the editions of the *Collectorium*. See also Oberman, *Gabriel Biel and Late Medieval Nominalism*, pp. 123–126 ('Gabriel Biel as a historian of Christian thought').

⁶ 'Utrumque et fomitem [defined by Biel in this context as 'lex carnis'] includi in ratione peccati originalis tamquam materiale et ipsum non includi, sed esse annexum de facto, est probabile. Patet conclusio quia utramque partem tenent viri sancti et docti famosissimi, neutraque pars est ab ecclesia reprobata . . .' [Both the view that concupiscence is a material part of Original Sin, and that it is not a part, but an actual annex to it, is probable. This conclusion imposes itself because pious, learned and most famous scholars uphold both views, and neither view is reproved by the Church] (*II Sent. d 30 q 2 art 2 concl. 5*, ed. Tübingen, 1501, fol. q iij^r; partially quoted by Oberman, p. 123, note 8). Oberman, pp. 121–123, gives a useful survey of the question of Original Sin in the medieval tradition, as it was treated by Biel. See for a more detailed study of Biel and Original Sin Gross, *Entwicklungsgeschichte des Erbsündendogmas im Zeitalter der Scholastik (12.–15. Jahrhundert)*, pp. 351–360.

⁷ Quoted above, chapter 5, p. 181.

between Adam and Eve. Except in the circle of certain heretics (notably the Cathars), such a position appears not to have received serious consideration by any theologian before (or, for that matter, after) Agrippa.⁸

De originali peccato never achieved the same degree of influence, let alone popularity, among a nonprofessional audience, as was the case with some of Agrippa's other works, such as *De nobilitate et praecellentia foeminei sexus* or *De incertitudine*. Wichwael, the dedicatee of the treatise, sent a short and negative reaction, to which Agrippa reacted in detail in order to clarify his position.⁹ After that, there are no indications that Agrippa's treatise played any role whatsoever in the discussion of Original Sin during his lifetime and immediately after his death. During this time, the question was one of the topics which led to intensive debate, before the matter was settled by the formulation of dogmas in the Catholic Church and the various Protestant denominations. In the course of the sixteenth century, *De originali peccato* was mentioned explicitly, among other works of Agrippa, in several lists of books forbidden to the faithful, for instance in the index published by the Sorbonne in 1544, the 1549 index of Venice, and the 1559 index of the Spanish inquisition.¹⁰

In the second half of the seventeenth and in the eighteenth centuries, *De originali peccato* came briefly into the limelight as a result of the fact that several controversial authors came forward with the same view as that of Agrippa. The most famous of these was the Dutchman Hadriaan Beverland (1650–1716).¹¹ Without exception, the reaction to Agrippa's opinion was, in this period, as negative as it was to Beverland's thesis, for which he had been condemned in the Dutch Republic. Thus, Pierre Bayle mentions Agrippa's opinion in the article 'Adam' and calls it 'scabreuse'.¹² Not surprisingly, this view of Agrippa's opinion, as formulated by Bayle, contributed substan-

⁸ See Gerbi, *Il peccato di Adamo ed Eva*.

⁹ Wichwael's reaction in *Epistolae*, 2, 18, d.d. 1518, p. 663. Agrippa's response to Wichwael is included in the dedicatory letter of the short treatise *Contra pestem antidota*, *Epistolae*, 2, 19, d.d. 6 February 1518, pp. 666–669.

¹⁰ de Bujanda, ed., *Index de l'université de Paris*, p. 125; id., *Index de l'inquisition espagnole*, p. 365. See also Reusch, ed., *Die Indices librorum prohibitorum des sechzehnten Jahrhunderts*, p. 140. See also Reusch, *Der index der verbotenen Bücher. Ein Beitrag zur Kirchen- und Literaturgeschichte*, vol. 1, p. 121.

¹¹ See on Beverland, De Smet, *Hadrianus Beverlandus (1650–1716)*. See for the history of Beverland's thesis and its influence, Gerbi, *Il peccato di Adamo ed Eva*.

¹² Cited by Gerbi, p. 96.

tially to Agrippa's reputation as a charlatan. The theologian Louis-Ellies Du Pin or Dupin (1657–1719), who formulated, as noted above, the widespread view that Agrippa's treatises are empty and bombastic rather than scholarly and profound writings, considered *De originali peccato* to be a joke:

Mais l'opinion la plus extraordinaire et la plus extravagante qu'Agrippa ait soutenue, est celle qui regarde le péché d'Adam: sçavoir que son peché n'a été autre chose que le commerce charnel qu'il eut avec Eve: et ce qui est encore plus ridicule, que le serpent ou le démon qui tenta Eve, étoit le membre viril. Je veux croire que c'est un jeu d'esprit, quoiqu'il le dise et le prouve fort serieusement dans une Déclamation faite exprès sur ce sujet: mais quand cela seroit, est-il permis de se jouer ainsi de ce qu'il y a de plus grave dans la Religion? (*Nouvelle bibliothèque des auteurs ecclésiastiques*, ed. 1703, p. 143)

The attention which *De originali peccato* attracted is also attested by an anonymous biographical study from 1772 called *Agrippaeana*.¹³ This remarkable writing contains, after a brief but well-informed biography (pp. 5–16) and a section containing a summary of and various remarks on *De incertitudine* and *De occulta philosophia* (pp. 16–42), a complete translation of *De originali peccato* (pp. 43–65). The author then cites the Latin text of Wichwael's (whom he calls Agrippa's father) reaction to the treatise. After discussing Wichwael's objections, the author makes several remarks concerning the different views on Original Sin, among which it is mentioned explicitly that the opinion of those authors who follow Agrippa is heretical, namely Johannes Baptista van Helmont (1579–1644), the anonymous author of a treatise called 'Etat de l'homme dans le péché originel,' Hadriaan Beverland (1650–1716) and Isaac Vossius (1618–1689) in his notes on Catullus (p. 68).

3. Main thesis of *De originali peccato*

De originali peccato is part of Agrippa's explanation of his Neoplatonic view of man, and constitutes an allegorical interpretation of Genesis 1–3. For Agrippa, the claim that Original Sin had consisted in the

¹³ *Agrippaeana: oder Heinrich Cornelius Agrippä etc. merkwürdiges Leben und Schriften, aus bewährten Urkunden gesammelt, und sonderbar mit dessen in das Teutsche übersetzten Tractat: von der Erbsünde vermehret. von T.K.D.P., s.l., 1772*. There is also a Dutch translation from 1658 (see bibliography).

act of sexual intercourse between Adam and Eve proceeded naturally from the combination of the description of the Fall in Genesis and other Scriptural passages dealing with sin on the one hand, and on the other hand the theory of the triple constitution of man in the image of God, to be found in the Hermetic and Neoplatonic tradition. In fact, his point was already clearly set forth in the *Dialogus de homine*, written during his stay in Italy, to which Agrippa himself refers as the text that constitutes the basis of *De originali peccato*:

Ipsa autem opinio nostra talis est, non aliud fuisse originale peccatum, quam carnalem copulam viri et mulieris, quod ita esse in quodam dialogo nostro de homine paucis quibusdam sacrarum literarum coniecturis persuasimus, sed nunc id ipsum paulo diffusius (succincte tamen) ostendemus. (*Collected Treatises*, fol. I 5^v; *Opera*, p. 554)

Our opinion is as follows: Original Sin was nothing else but sexual intercourse between man and woman. I have tried to argue this point convincingly in my dialogue entitled 'The Human Race,' by means of the interpretation of several Biblical passages, but I now want to return to this and explain it more in detail, though still concisely.

The *Dialogus de homine* constitutes a digest of notes on the first dialogue of the *Corpus Hermeticum*, the *Pimander*, which Agrippa had planned to publish during his Italian period.¹⁴ In this *Dialogus* Agrippa explains the Neoplatonic view expressed in *Pimander* that Man was created as a microcosm, consisting of a *mundus intellectualis*, a *mundus elementalis* and a *mundus celestis*.¹⁵ In his paradisaical state, man was an immortal hermaphrodite, living in a permanent state of unhindered divine contemplation. The *Dialogus* also explains succinctly how the paradisaical state of man ended, as a result of which man became a mortal being, dividing into male and female and becoming subject to animal urges. It is to this section of the dialogue that Agrippa probably (probably, since only a fragment of the dialogue now survives) refers in *De originali peccato*, more specifically to the passage in which he draws a parallel between *Pimander*, 13–14 (where the fall of man is described), and Romans 5, 12, the text that forms the core of Christian teaching on Original Sin:

¹⁴ See above, chapter 1, p. 23.

¹⁵ Ed. Zambelli, pp. 60–61.

Homo autem cum in honore esset, omniumque haberet arbitrium, prevaricatus divinum preceptum corpus amplectens, 'a lucida spera contemplationis, in speram concupiscentie et tenebrarum lapsus est' [*Pimander*, 13],¹⁶ imitatus est iumenta non habentia rationem,¹⁷ et similis factus est illis. Tunc indignata et recedente divina luce, quod pacificum vinculum erat elementorum, relaxatis frenis et discordantibus humoribus, innumeri morbi morborumque cause peccata orta sunt, homoque propter peccatum morti factus est obnoxius. In quo primo homine peccatore, ut ait Paulus ad Romanos, tamquam in radice, omnes homines ex illo geniti peccaverunt et moriuntur omnibus horis.¹⁸ (*Dialogus de homine*, p. 67)

At the time when man was held in honor and controlled everything, he acted in defiance of God's command and, embracing his body, 'he fell from the lucid sphere of contemplation into the sphere of concupiscence and darkness,' he imitated the beasts which have no reason and became like them. When at that moment the divine light, which had held all the elements together, took offense and withdrew, the restraints were loosened and the humors became disharmonious, at that moment innumerable diseases and sins, the causes of diseases, came into being, and man became subject to death as a result of his sin. In him, the first man to sin, as St. Paul says to the Romans, as in the root, all human beings who stem from him sinned and die at all times.

It is clear from this passage that Agrippa involved the *Pimander* in his reflections on the problem of Original Sin. The view that Original Sin consisted in the sexual act, and more generally, that God disapproves of sexuality, was in all probability most strongly suggested to Agrippa by a passage from *Pimander*, 18, in which physical love ('amor corporis') is mentioned as the cause of death, that is, man's fall from the paradisaical state.¹⁹ In Ficino's translation, this passage, in which the origin of earthly man (as opposed to celestial man) is described, runs as follows:

¹⁶ Agrippa quotes Ficino's translation, which is recorded slightly differently in the *Opera omnia*, vol. 2, p. 1837: 'unde a contemplatione patris ad sphaeram generationis delapsus est.'

¹⁷ *Pimander*, 14, in Ficino's translation: 'animantia . . . ratione carentia' (Ficino, *Opera omnia*, vol. 2, p. 1837).

¹⁸ Agrippa takes the words 'in quo' in Romans 5, 12 to refer to Adam; see also Zambelli's note ad loc. and our remarks above, p. 226.

¹⁹ See for this interpretation Dodd, *The Bible and the Greeks*, p. 152: 'The story of the Fall of the heavenly Man is at the same time the story of the origin of earthly man. As we have seen, the moral of the whole story for the Hermetist is that it was

Extemplo Deus verbo sancto clamavit: pullulate, adolescite, propagate universa germina atque opera mea. Vos insuper quibus mentis portio concessa est, genus recognoscite vestrum, vestramque naturam immortalem considerate. Amorem corporis mortis causam esse scite, rerum omnium naturam discite. (*Pimander*, chapter 18; Ficino, *Opera omnia*, p. 1838.)²⁰

Immediately God spoke a holy speech: 'Shoot up, come to maturity, and multiply, all that grows, all that I have created. And you who have been granted a degree of intellect, remember your kind and consider that your nature is immortal. Realize that the love of the body is the cause of death and learn the nature of all things.'

In order to understand the focus of Agrippa's thesis, it is useful to look briefly at the objection of Wichwael and at Agrippa's response. Wichwael argues against Agrippa's thesis that there exists a complete consensus among theologians concerning the fact that Original Sin cannot be situated in something of which the rational soul (that is, the intellect) is not part.²¹ Agrippa responds that he agrees with this view, but states that the character of Original Sin is such that it must be responsible for the fall of the complete paradisaical man, that is, all three elements which constitute man (namely, the rational, sensual and vegetative elements). His point is that Original Sin began in rational potency, but came to fulfillment in the body. According to Agrippa, only carnal sin combines the sin of both the mind and the body; he interprets a remark of St. Paul on sexual morality in this light (1 Corinthians 6, 18: 'every other sin a person

love of material nature that caused to become mortal in becoming sexual. This theory determines the sense in which he will read the story of the Fall in Genesis.' Compare the commentary ad loc. of B. Copenhaver, *Hermetica*, p. 112: 'sexual love is certainly meant.'

²⁰ Compare the end of par. 19, in Ficino's translation: 'Demum qui seipsum cognovit, bonum (quod est super essentiam) consecutus est, qui vero corpora, amoris errore complectebatur, is oberrabat in tenebris, mortis mala sensu percipiens' (Ficino, *Opera omnia*, vol. 2, p. 1838) [Finally, he who knows himself, has attained the goodness that exists above nature, but he who, because of the error of love, has embraced material things, wanders about in darkness, perceiving with his senses the evil things of death]. Agrippa quotes the words 'mortis mala sensu percipiens' in *De originali peccato*, fol. I 7^v; *Opera*, p. 557; see below, p. 238.

²¹ 'Est attamen theologizantium consona omnium sententia, originalem maculam illic esse non posse, ubi rationalis anima non est' [But it is common opinion among theologians that original sin cannot be there, where there is not rational soul] (*Epistolae*, 2, 18, d.d. 1518, p. 663).

commits is outside the body, but he who fornicates sins against his own body').

4. *Structure and content of De originali peccato*

In the following pages, a full survey of the content of the treatise and explanatory remarks will be presented. The sources used by Agrippa, which are for the most part indicated (albeit incompletely by modern standards) in the margin of the first edition (*Collected Treatises*, fols. I 3^v–K 4^r), and reproduced in part in *Opera*, pp. 551–565, have been identified. The annotations appended to the German translation included in the *Agrippaeana*, pp. 43–65, have been helpful in the course of identifying the sources.

The structure of *De originali peccato* can be schematically presented as follows:

1. Introduction: allegorical interpretation of the creation of man and of the Garden of Eden (*Collected Treatises*, fols. I 3^v 'In principio libri Geneseos'—I 4^r 'generationis membra delitescunt'; *Opera*, pp. 551–552).

2. Main thesis: allegorical interpretation of Original Sin (*Collected Treatises*, fols. I 4^r 'Sed ad ulteriora procedamus'—I 5^r 'exponere visum est'; *Opera*, pp. 552–554).

3. Argumentation

3. a. Argumentation in favor of the main thesis: exegesis of Genesis 1–3 (*Collected Treatises*, fols. I 5^r 'Restat ut ostendamus'—I 7^v 'mortis mala sensu percipiens'; *Opera*, pp. 554–557).

3. b. Refutation of objections to the main thesis: exegesis of Biblical testimonies confirming the argumentation (*Collected Treatises*, fols. I 7^v 'Sed haec quae iam dicta sunt'—K 3^v 'Dominus est'; *Opera*, pp. 557–563).

3. b. 1. First perspective: the *maledictio partus*; Genesis 3, 16 (*Collected Treatises*, fol. I 7^v 'Sed haec quae iam dicta sunt . . . sine sanguine'; *Opera*, pp. 557–558).

3. b. 2. Second perspective: the generations before the Flood; Genesis 4–5 (*Collected Treatises*, fols. I 7^v ‘Sed videamus quid secutum est—I 8^v ab uxoribus separantur’; *Opera*, pp. 558–559).

3. b. 3. Third perspective: New Testament testimonies illustrating that chastity is the most important virtue (*Collected Treatises*, fols. I 8^v ‘Hinc innotescit nobis’—K i^v ‘propagatur virginitas’; *Opera*, pp. 559–560).

3. b. 4. Fourth perspective: the generations after the Flood (*Collected Treatises*, fols. K1^v ‘Sed redeamus ad superiora’—K 3^v ‘Dominus est’; *Opera*, pp. 560–563).

4. Conclusion (*Collected Treatises*, fols. K 3^v ‘Iam ex his scripturarum mysteriis’—K 4^r ‘non fuerit reprobata’; *Opera*, pp. 563–565) Refutation of the literal interpretation of Genesis 1, 28 (‘Be fertile and multiply’).

* * * *

1. Introduction: Allegorical interpretation of the creation of man and of the Garden of Eden (*Collected Treatises*, fols. I 3^v ‘In principio libri Geneseos’—I 4^r ‘generationis membra delitescunt’; *Opera*, pp. 551–552).

Like *De nobilitate et praecellentia foeminei sexus*, *De originali peccato* is entirely centered upon the Biblical story of the Creation (Genesis 1–3). *De originali peccato* begins with the explanation, in line with standard Neoplatonic anthropological notions, of the verses concerning the creation of man in Genesis 1, 26: ‘Then God said: Let us make man in our image, after our likeness,’ and 2, 7: ‘the Lord God formed man out of the clay of the ground and blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and so man became a living being.’ Agrippa equates man’s creation after God’s image (Genesis 1, 26) with the interior man (that is, the rational or intellectual soul created after the image of the triune God). He then states that Genesis 2, 7 indicates God’s granting of a suitable abode to the soul, namely the human body (*corpus humanum/terrenum*); the blowing of the breath of life into man’s nostrils denotes the actual formation of the complete man. The garden of Eden is defined as the center of the cosmos.

The two trees in the garden of Eden (Genesis 2, 9) are interpreted as follows. The tree of life is defined as that of God's knowledge, including the constant contemplation of God and the fruit of that contemplation, namely wisdom and chastity, bringing forth in their turn eternal life. Agrippa quotes here, to document his interpretation, Proverbs 3, 18: 'She (i.e. wisdom) is a tree of life for those who grasp her.' The tree of the knowledge of good and evil is defined as carnal desire (*affectus carnis*) and the knowledge of earthly things (*prudencia terrenorum*), which bring forth negligence and ignorance of God. The central position of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is explained in the common Neoplatonic way. In terms of the macrocosm, the tree is situated in the center of the universe, that is, on earth, the place of mortality and corruption; in terms of the microcosm, it is situated in the center of man, that is, both the center of the interior man, that is, the abode of the intellect which mediates between the spiritual and the sensual forces (*purus intellectus, sensibilis anima*), and in the center of the physical man, that is, in the genitals.

2. Main thesis: Allegorical interpretation of Original Sin (*Collected Treatises*, fols. I 4^v 'Sed ad ulteriora procedamus'—I 5^r 'exponere visum est'; *Opera*, pp. 552–554).

Agrippa then focuses on Adam, Eve and the serpent. Adam is interpreted as the embodiment of faith, the support of reason (*fides stabilita in Deo, fundamentum rationis*). Eve, born from Adam's rib, is reason (*ratio libera*), and the serpent the inclination toward sensual pleasures. The serpent tempted Eve, who in her turn tempted Adam. Allegorically, this means that reason got the better of faith, and as a result of this disregard of the Deity the unhindered contemplation of God came to an end, and man fell into his earthly existence and became subject to death.

At this point in his discussion, Agrippa elaborates two important thoughts which are characteristic of his theology. First, he again voices the thought, previously formulated in *De nobilitate et praecellentia foeminei sexus*, that Adam, not Eve was responsible for the fall, because Eve (reason) was not constrained by obedience to God, in contrast with Adam (faith); the order was given to Adam before the creation of Eve, Genesis 2, 16–22. He thus once again formulates his opposition to the misogynistic strain in Christian theology. Second, Agrippa offers a moral interpretation of this passage, discussed above in

chapter 3. He defines faith as naturally prior in time and importance to reason, and emphasizes that no human being should ever let reason prevail over faith in God (although reason is free to investigate scientifically all created things). In this context, Agrippa here specially condemns those who believe in prophecies of all kinds, paraphrasing, to support his judgment, the words of Isaiah, criticizing the Babylonians 47, 10: 'Your wisdom and your knowledge led you astray' and 47, 13: 'Let the astrologers stand forth to save you, who forecast what will happen to you, you wearied yourself with many consultations.' This moral lesson, succinctly formulated here, is the main idea that Agrippa consistently impresses on his contemporaries, specially in the monumental *De incertitudine*. It is thus clear that *De originali peccato* occupies a central position in Agrippa's theological thinking.

3. Argumentation

3. a. Argumentation in favor of the main thesis: exegesis of Genesis 1–3 (*Collected Treatises*, fols. I 5^r 'Restat ut ostendamus'—I 7^v 'mortis mala sensu percipiens' *Opera*, pp. 554–557).

In this section, Agrippa provides cross references to show that the serpent, who symbolizes the 'demon' inherent in human life and a constant threat to human happiness, stands for carnal desire, and more concretely, the male organ:

... hunc serpentem non alium arbitramur, quam sensibilem carnalemque affectum, immo quem recte dixerimus, ipsum carnalis concupiscentiae genitale viri membrum, membrum reptile, membrum serpens, membrum lubricum, variisque anfractibus tortuosum, quod Evam tentavit atque decepit. (*Collected Treatises*, fols. I 5^v–I 6^r; *Opera*, pp. 554–555)

... this serpent I consider to be no other than our disposition toward the senses and the flesh, or rather, the male genital organ of carnal desire, the creeping member, the serpentine member, the lustful member, devious in various ways, which tempted and deceived Eve.

This definition of the serpent is supported by a number of relevant testimonies which refer to the 'demon' in man's life, most of which are quoted verbally: God's words to Job in Job 40, 16 (11 in the Vulgate): 'Behold the strength in his loins, and his vigor in the sinews of his belly;' 2 Corinthians 12, 7, where the demon is called 'a thorn in the flesh, an angel of Satan.' Agrippa states that God's

prohibition that Adam not eat from the tree of good and evil does not imply that the knowledge of good has been prohibited, but only the knowledge of evil. This knowledge he puts on a par with the knowledge of the flesh and of licentiousness, referring as illustration to Romans 12, 3, where St. Paul teaches the Christians 'not to think of themselves more highly than one ought to think, but to think chastely'; Agrippa remarks that he follows St. Jerome's reading 'ad castitatem,' not the reading 'ad sobrietatem.'²² According to Agrippa, God regretted the creation of man after the fall, because even He could not restore virginity once it had been lost, as the prophet Amos 5, 2, confirms: 'She [i.e., the house of Israel] is fallen, to rise no more, the virgin Israel; she lies abandoned upon her land, with no one to raise her up.'

Next, Agrippa takes an argument from Genesis 3, stressing that the first reaction of Adam and Eve after the fall was to hide their naked bodies from the face of God and to cover their genitals out of shame and contrition. He also quotes Romans 6, 21: 'But what profit did you get then from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death,' to confirm that the sin of Adam and Eve produced corruption and death. He then observes that this guilt accounts for the sense of shame which man and woman feel by nature before one another in their sexual relationship, even within marriage. This argument from nature is further developed in a vivid description of the public outcry that would develop if a married couple were to follow the advice of Diogenes the Cynic and have sexual intercourse in public.

Subsequently, Agrippa elaborates the following contrast: in paradise, man and woman were uncorrupted, immortal and virginal, and marriage was consummated by the word and spirit of God; after the Fall, man and woman were tainted and degraded to the level of animals, they became subject to death, and marriage had henceforth to be consummated by sexual intercourse. He illustrates this elaboration with several appropriate testimonies, quoted literally or paraphrased,²³ and concludes with the observation that as a result,

²² A marginal note refers to the source: Jerome, *Adversus Iovinianum*, 1, 37; *Patrologia Latina*, vol. 23, 274 C.

²³ Namely 1 Corinthians 15, 50: 'This I declare, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does corruption inherit the kingdom of God'; Galatians 6, 8: 'Because the one who sows for his flesh will reap corruption from the flesh, but the one who sows for the spirit will reap eternal life from the spirit';

everything that is born or produced on earth must necessarily be tainted by Original Sin. This conclusion, Agrippa finally observes, can be inferred not only from the Bible, but also from the first dialogue of the *Corpus Hermeticum*, the *Pimander*:

... quod et Hermes in Pimandro longa satis oratione ostendit, hominem videlicet a divina contemplatione lapsum in naturam generationis 'animantium mundi mortalium ac ratione carentium', [*Pimander*, 14]²⁴ unde et ipse 'formam ratione carentem progeniuit' [*Pimander*, 14],²⁵ 'mortis mala sensu percipiens' [*Pimander*, 19].²⁶ (*Collected Treatises*, fol. I 7^v; *Opera*, p. 557)

... this point is also shown by Hermes, in the *Pimander*, in a rather long oration, namely that humankind has fallen from its contemplation of the Deity into the genus of the animals of this world, which are mortal and lack the capacity of reasoning. Consequently, humankind too, perceiving with his senses the evil things of death, brought forth a body lacking the capacity of reasoning.

A little earlier, Agrippa had paraphrased Psalm 49 (48 in the Vulgate), 13 in terms which clearly remind of the above quoted passage from his *Dialogus de homine*, where a parallel is drawn between *Pimander*, 13–14, and Romans 5, 12:

Homo autem cum in honore esset virginitatis, noluit intelligere ut caste viveret, sed per carnis libidinem factus est similis iumentis non habentibus rationem, et per mortem comparatus est illis. (*Collected Treatises*, fol. I 7^r; *Opera*, p. 556; see p. 231 above for the passage from the *Dialogus de homine*)

Man, at the time that he enjoyed the honor of virginity, refused to understand that he must live chastely, but through the lust of the flesh he became like the beasts which possess no reason and through death he has become like them.

Psalm 49 (48 in the Vulgate), 13: 'For all their riches mortals do not abide; they perish like the beasts'; Psalm 32 (31 in the Vulgate), 9: 'Do not be senseless [i.e., irrational] like horses or mules'; Jeremiah 5, 8: 'Lustful stallions they are, each neighs after another's wife'; 2 Peter 2, 10–2: 'because they follow the flesh with its depraved desire, or like irrational animals born by nature for capture and destruction, they will also be destroyed in their destruction'; Genesis 6, 3: 'Then the Lord said: my spirit shall not remain in man forever, since he is but flesh.'

²⁴ Agrippa quotes Ficino's translation (*Opera omnia*, vol. 2, p. 1837).

²⁵ Agrippa quotes Ficino's translation (*Opera omnia*, vol. 2, p. 1837).

²⁶ Agrippa quotes Ficino's translation (*Opera omnia*, vol. 2, p. 1838). See also above, p. 232, note 20.

3. b. Refutation of objections to the main thesis: exegesis of Biblical testimonies confirming the argumentation (*Collected Treatises*, fols. I 7^v 'Sed haec quae iam dicta sunt'—K 3^v 'Dominus est'; *Opera*, pp. 557–563).

Agrippa anticipates a fundamental criticism of his thesis, namely that the similarity in meaning between *Pimander* and *Genesis* can only be achieved through a distorted interpretation of the Scriptural text. He therefore proceeds in the second section of this part of his treatise to corroborate his opinion, from four different perspectives, with additional evidence, but now to rephrase it in more general terms:

Sed haec quae iam dicta sunt fortasse nimis violenter contortis scripturis ad hanc opinionem corroborandam exposuisse videbimur, nisi alia adhuc testimonia adferamus, quibus perspicacius videre liceat commixtionem carnis displicuisse Deo. (*Collected Treatises*, fol. I 7^v; *Opera*, p. 557)

But I will perhaps seem to have given my account so far by means of all too distorted statements from Scripture in order to corroborate my thesis, unless I quote further testimonies, through which it is possible to see very clearly that God was displeased with the sexual act.

3. b. 1. First perspective: the *maledictio partus*; Genesis 3, 16 (*Collected Treatises*, fol. I 7^v 'Sed haec quae iam dicta sunt . . . sine sanguine'; *Opera*, pp. 557–558).

Agrippa here observes that the pain of child bearing is a corollary to the fact that conception takes place with physical lust. Psalm 7, 15–17 is quoted to illustrate this thought: 'Sinners conceive iniquity; pregnant with mischief, they give birth to failure. They open a hole and dig it deep, but fall into the pit they have dug. Their mischief comes back upon themselves; their violence falls on their own heads.' Agrippa mentions two further examples of physical distress to which women are subject by nature, since neither can a virgin be raped, nor can a woman give birth, without the shedding of blood.

3. b. 2. Second perspective: the generations before the Flood; Genesis 4–5 (*Collected Treatises*, fols. I 7^v–I 8^v 'Sed videamus

quid secutum est . . . ab uxoribus separantur'; *Opera*, pp. 558–559).

In this section, Agrippa focuses on Genesis 4–5 to argue his main thesis. He observes that Cain, who was born of Original Sin and is therefore called the *filius peccati*, is the ancestor of the sinners who will perish in the Flood. The murder of Abel, the second son, who was conceived after penance was done for the first sin and is hence called the *filius misericordiae*, is interpreted by Agrippa as a sacrifice to God, that cleanses with martyr's blood the filth of carnal marriage. Seth, who is born after Abel's murder and whose name means resurrection, is, through his son Enoch (meaning 'truthful man'), the ancestor of Jesus Christ and of the 'generation of chastity and resurrection to life' that will survive the Flood. These observations are supplemented with explanatory remarks concerning the mystical meaning of the number of generations until the Flood mentioned in the genealogical table of Cain and Seth. The family of Cain, he observes, became extinct in the eleventh generation, eleven being the number of sin and transgression. On the other hand, Noah, the righteous man ('iustus'), is the tenth descendant of Seth from Adam onward, ten being the number of law and justice. This kind of argument is valid for Agrippa, because in his view numbers contain certain truths bestowed on them by God (see *De occulta philosophia*, 2, 21; see also 2, 2–3). Agrippa also sees an argument in favor of his thesis in the fact that, in the genealogical table of Cain, the last person to be named before the Flood came as God's punishment for man's wickedness is a woman named Naamah, meaning 'voluptas', pleasure (Genesis 4, 22).

3. b. 3. Third perspective: New Testament testimonies illustrating that chastity is the most important virtue (*Collected Treatises*, fols. I 8^v 'Hinc innotescit nobis'—K i^v 'propagatur virginitas'; *Opera*, pp. 559–560).

Agrippa derives additional arguments to support his thesis that in paradise man was not permitted to have intercourse with woman from the following recommendations of St. Paul concerning marriage and virginity: 1 Corinthians 7, 1: 'It is a good thing for a man not to touch a woman'; Agrippa stresses St. Paul's use of the verb 'tangere' instead of 'habere':

... non dicit non habere, sed non tangere, quia in tactu periculum est, non in tactu manuum, sed serpentis, cuius virtus est 'in lumbis' et potestas 'in umbilico' [Job 40, 11]. (*Collected Treatises*, fol. K 1^r; *Opera*, p. 559)

... he (i.e. St. Paul) does not say 'not to have,' but 'not to touch.' For the danger lies in touching, not in touching with the hands, but with the serpent, whose strength is in his loins, and whose power is in the sinews (of his belly).

Other testimonies referred to are 1 Corinthians 7, 28: 'nor does an unmarried woman sin if she marries'; Agrippa interprets this statement as a concession by St. Paul to those who cannot live in abstinence; 1 Corinthians 7, 38: 'So then the one who marries his virgin does well; the one who does not marry her does better'; 1 Corinthians 7, 29: 'let those having wives act as not having them.' Next, Agrippa comments on Ephesians 5, 31–32: 'and the two (i.e. man and wife) shall become one flesh. This is a great mystery, but I speak in reference to Christ and the Church.' He argues that the explanation offered in verse 32 is necessary, because the earthly man is reborn in Christ not through his natural birth, but through spiritual birth. Additional illustrations for this interpretation are cited, namely James 1, 18: 'He willed to give us birth by the word of truth'; Ephesians 5, 25: 'Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ loved the church'; 1 Timothy 2, 14–15: 'the woman was deceived and transgressed, but she will be saved through motherhood, provided women persevere in faith and love and holiness, with self-control.' The best marriage, Agrippa remarks by way of conclusion to this brief section, is the marriage from which children are born who remain virgins.

3. b. 4. Fourth perspective: the generations after the Flood (*Collected Treatises*, fols. K1^v 'Sed redeamus ad superiora'—K 3^v 'Dominus est'; *Opera*, pp. 560–563).

Agrippa now returns to Genesis, and examines several arguments drawn from the vicissitudes of the generations after the Flood. This section is rather more heterogeneous than the previous sections, because he not only focusses solely on the Old Testament passages which form the core of this section, but he also discusses many relevant cross references to the New Testament.

First, he mentions as confirmation of his main thesis the fact that the sign by which God punished as well as healed our Original Sin was circumcision (Genesis 17, 10 ff.). The covenant of circumcision

also shows that Original Sin is passed on by man, not by woman (therefore woman remains uncircumcised and receives the command to purify herself only after giving birth: Leviticus 12, 4–5). Regarding circumcision Agrippa observes, in support of his main thesis, that Abraham, before his circumcision, produced offspring (namely Ishmael) from a sexual relationship with a maidservant (Genesis 16), but that after his circumcision, his elderly and hitherto barren wife Sarah produced in a miraculous way the son whom God had promised, namely Isaac (Genesis 21). Isaac, in his turn, became the father of Jacob in a miraculous way also, thanks to God's intervention, because his wife Rebekkah had been sterile (Genesis 25, 20 ff.). Finally, Agrippa has a comment on Jacob's struggle with the angel (Genesis 32, 23–32). According to Agrippa, Jacob's seed became sterile ('femur emarcuit', as Agrippa paraphrases Genesis 32, 32) after his struggle with the angel and this was why he was henceforth called Israel ('he who sees God'; see Genesis 32, 30 'because I have seen God face to face'). The reason for this was, Agrippa writes, that through sexual intercourse we see death, but through sexual abstinence we can be deserving of seeing God's reign.

Agrippa next observes that a large number can be given of examples of Biblical men and women miraculously born from old or barren parents, through whose mediation the restitution of our lost grace is promised to us: Isaac, Jacob, Samuel, Samson, John the Baptist, the Virgin Mary and others. According to Agrippa, these examples show how God hates man's sexual appetite. To this, he adds two observations from the prophets: Jeremiah 16, 2, was told by God not to get married; Ezekiel 24, 18–21 and 33, 22, did not have the gift of prophecy as long as he was married, but when his wife died he immediately became a prophet. Other testimonies to the same effect are mentioned: God ordered Moses, who wished to approach the burning bush, to remove his sandals (Exodus 3, 5); the sandals are, according to Agrippa, the symbol of marriage in Scripture. Joshua 5, 16, received the same order, and he was the example for Jesus Christ who saved the people of Israel from Egypt and led them to the promised land (Jude 5), which Moses was not allowed to enter, since he was married. Agrippa furthermore mentions that Moses was buried in the ravine opposite the temple called Phegor, which Agrippa defines as the temple of the god Priapus or disgrace.²⁷

²⁷ See for Moses's death and burial Deuteronomy 34, 5–6. In his reaction to

The prophet Joshua, on the other hand, died in the promised land, because he was an unmarried man (Joshua 24, 30).

Other testimonies follow from the generations after the Flood. The Israelites were commanded to sanctify themselves and to have no intercourse with any woman for three days prior to God's descent onto Mount Sinai (Exodus 19, 15). Agrippa defines Mount Sinai as the mountain of virginity, identifying it with the mountain to which Lot was told to flee with his wife and daughters (Genesis 19, 17), and stating, with a reference to 1 Corinthians 7, 9, that those who are not allowed to ascend it, namely those who cannot remain chaste, must remain in the city called Segor (Zoar; Genesis 19, 22); the name Segor (Zoar) stands for legal marriage. Agrippa then refers to the rules applying to priests under the Old Law, among which figured the prohibition against drinking alcohol (Leviticus 10, 10), since alcohol stimulates lewdness. He also refers to the episode in 1 Samuel 21, where the high priest Ahimelech, who is about to distribute the holy bread to David and his men, requires that they be ritually free from uncleanness, which was identified with the marriage act. Likewise, interpreting Deuteronomy 20, 6, he states that the Old Law forbade men who were starting families to serve as soldiers, because, as servants of their wives, they were not free to engage in battle on behalf of God. And St. Paul, Agrippa states (interpreting 1 Thesalonians 5, 6 and 17), argues that married men, who are obliged to perform the marriage act, are not free for constant worship. Agrippa mentions another relevant requirement of the Old Law, namely the rule that during the Passover ritual, the lamb must be eaten with one's loins girt (Exodus 12, 11); similarly, the apostles were ordered to gird their loins (Luke 12, 35), because as apostles, they had renounced marriage (with a reference to Matthew 19, 29). Other testimonies are added to prove that Jesus preferred celibates to married people (Matthew 19, 12 'Some have renounced marriage for the sake of the kingdom of heaven'; Isaiah 56, 4-5 'To the eunuch who observe my sabbaths . . . I will give, in my house and within my walls, a monument and a name better than sons and daughters; an eternal, imperishable name will I give them.' In order to show that the prophesy from Isaiah 56, 4-5 comes true, Agrippa refers back to the earlier

Wichwael's objection to his treatise, Agrippa makes some observations on the widespread worship of Priapus in olden times; *Epistolae*, 2, 19, d.d. 6 February 1518, p. 667.

quoted verse attesting to the death of Joshua in the promised land (24, 30).

Agrippa then returns to Matthew 19, 12 in order to specify by means of cross references the notion of eunuchs ('eunuchi') used by the apostle. The eunuchs are 'they who were not defiled with women; they are virgins and these are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever he goes' (Revelation 14, 4). Agrippa also mentions the apostle John who was Christ's beloved disciple because he was a virgin, and about whom the word spread that he would not die; Agrippa recapitulates the episode of the beloved disciple (John 21, 20–23) and confirms it by citing Matthew 16, 28: 'I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.' These last two testimonies bring Agrippa back to his original idea that sexuality and death are connected, and he rounds off his argumentation with the following thought:

Non enim moritur virgo, sed manet in Christo, et dormitio eius non mors, sed transitio est. In virginitate namque primi parentes immortales erant, per praevaricationem autem virginitatis utriusque naturae mortem sibi posterisque pepererunt, in virginitate fruebantur cognitione ipsius boni, amissa virginitate, caligante intellectu, apertisque oculis carnis cognoverunt malum, privati ipsius boni lumine, quo intima visione Dei fruebantur virgines. Hinc cum apostoli post resurrectionem Christi piscarentur in lacu Genazareth, stante Iesu in littore nesciebant apostoli quem viderent, solus autem virgo Ioannes cognovit Deum et dixit Petro: 'Dominus est.' (*Collected Treatises*, fols. K 3^{r-v}; *Opera*, p. 563)

For the virgin does not die, but continues to exist in Christ, and his passing away is not a death, but a transition. For in their virgin state, the first parents were immortal, but through their betrayal of virginity they obtained for themselves and their posterity the death of both natures. In their virgin state, they enjoyed the knowledge of good itself; after their loss of virginity, the intellect was blind and with the eyes of the flesh they learned to know evil, robbed as they were of the light of good itself, through which they had enjoyed as virgins the contemplation of God. That is why the apostles, when they were fishing in the Sea of Tiberias after Christ's resurrection, did not know whom they saw when Christ was standing on the shore. Only the virgin John recognized God, and he said to Peter, 'It is the Lord' (John 21, 7).

4. Conclusion: refutation of the literal interpretation of Genesis 1, 28 (*Collected Treatises*, fols. K 3^v 'Iam ex his scripturarum mysteriis'—K 4^r 'non fuerit reprobata'; *Opera*, pp. 563–565).

In the brief final section, Agrippa discusses a last testimony, one that could be used to contradict all the previous illustrations of the thesis that God disapproved of sexuality, namely Genesis 1, 28: 'Be fertile and multiply.' In order to explain this testimony, he calls upon the mystery of Christianity, hidden to ordinary men and only comprehensible to the Saints. What Agrippa has in mind here is the thought that procreation in man's prelapsarian state was not a physical, but a spiritual process. He had already mentioned this earlier, in section 3 a, where he remarked that in paradise, marriage was consummated not by the physical act of marriage, but by the word and spirit of God. Here, he also further mentions that he has explained this thought in the *Dialogus de homine* (it is not entirely clear to which passage he is referring),²⁸ and refers to John Damascene and other Greek theologians.²⁹

²⁸ See ed. Zambelli, p. 66, note 37.

²⁹ Agrippa possibly has in mind John Damascene, *De fide orthodoxa*, 4, 24; *Patrologia Graeca*, vol. 94, 1206–1215, specially 1209–1210 B (with facing Latin translation).

CHAPTER EIGHT

DE SACRAMENTO MATRIMONII DECLAMATIO

1. *Composition and publication of De sacramento matrimonii*

Agrippa wrote and published *De sacramento matrimonii* at the beginning of 1526, at a time when his position at the French Royal court became increasingly untenable. He dedicated the treatise to Margaret of Angoulême, duchess of Alençon, and later Queen of Navarre. *De sacramento matrimonii* is the only treatise of which Agrippa himself provided a translation, namely in French. This translation was published together with the Latin text in an edition which bears no date, but which was almost certainly printed in 1526.¹ The *Collected Treatises* of 1529 also contain the Latin text of the treatise (but not the translation), to which were added two letters in which Agrippa responded to the criticism of certain courtiers against the treatise.²

2. *First reactions to De sacramento matrimonii*

The fact that Agrippa dedicated his treatise to Margaret, sister of Francis I and daughter of Louise of Savoy, suggests that Agrippa wrote it in order to ameliorate his relationship with the Royal family, specially with the Queen Mother. He failed signally in this attempt, because the treatise was openly criticized before the Queen and the Princess by influential courtiers. Hence Jean Chapelain, Louise's physician and Agrippa's loyal friend during these difficult years, postponed the official presentation of the volume, as he wrote

¹ See on the date of the edition Prost, vol. 2, Appendice, note 28, p. 506; see also Appendice, note 34, p. 526, no. 1. The edition is recorded in the *Index Aureliensis*, no. 101.870. The copy of the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris was consulted (Rés. D. 65136). The French translation was reprinted in Droz, *Chemins de l'hérésie. Textes et documents*, vol. 2, pp. 1-27.

² *Collected Treatises*, fols. D 6^v-E 6^r, for the treatise; E 6^v-F1^r, for the letters; the two letters are also included in the correspondence as *Epistolae*, 4, 7, d.d. 7 May 1526, pp. 787-789; 4, 3, d.d. 1 May 1526, pp. 783-784.

to Agrippa in a letter written from Bordeaux, where the court was temporarily residing:

Nonnulli, qui tamen de Christianorum numero censentur, propter nonnullos locos tuum istum laborem de coniugio parum probant: et sunt, quibus non infrequens est cum dominabus collocutio. Itaque veritus, ne in dedecus magis, quam ad tui commendationem cederet, hactenus libellorum praesentationem distuli. (*Epistolae*, 4, 2, d.d. 2 April 1526, pp. 782–783)

Some men, although they are considered to be good Christians, do not approve of your treatise on marriage because of a few passages; and they happen to be men who speak frequently with their Highnesses. Therefore, I have postponed the presentation of the volumes, fearing that it might rather lead to your disgrace than to your advantage.

In his answer to Chapelain, Agrippa reacted to the anonymous criticism in the manner which had characterized his earlier approach to the criticism of professional theologians at Dôle in 1509 and at Metz in 1518. He expresses his indignation (as in 1518, in a scornful rather than conciliatory style) at what he saw as a pernicious attack, and promises that, if only he were to be challenged in an appropriately public forum, he would refute all possible objections by means of relevant arguments.³ A week later, Agrippa wrote a letter to ask the support of Michel d'Arande, a close associate of Margaret of Angoulême.⁴ In this letter, he refuted in detail two points of criticism which had been raised against his treatise, and which had been communicated to him by Robert Canalis, bishop of Vence from 1523 to 1530.⁵ Nothing further is known concerning Arande's possible reaction to Agrippa's letter or what steps he actually took on behalf of Agrippa, but on June 29, Chapelain wrote from Angoulême that the Queen Mother and the Princess had appreciatively accepted the volume containing Agrippa's treatise.⁶

Like *De nobilitate et praecellentia foeminei sexus* and *De incertitudine, De sacramento matrimonii* was reprinted and translated several times (though considerably less often) in various languages during the sixteenth,

³ *Epistolae*, 4, 3, d.d. 1 May 1526, pp. 783–784.

⁴ For Michel d'Arande see Nauert, pp. 90–91. During the twenties, the Faculty of Theology in Paris suspected d'Arande of heresy (Farge, *Orthodoxy and Reform in Early Reformation France*, p. 169).

⁵ *Epistolae*, 4, 7, d.d. 7 May 1526, pp. 787–789.

⁶ *Epistolae*, 4, 23, p. 802.

seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Besides the *editio princeps* and the reprints in the *Opera* editions, there exist three sixteenth-century Latin editions of the treatise.⁷ In 1530, it was translated into French together with *De nobilitate et praecellentia foeminei sexus*,⁸ in 1540 (reprint 1545) a separate English translation appeared.⁹ In the eighteenth century, a German (1713) and a French translation (1726) appeared together with translations of *De nobilitate et praecellentia foeminei sexus* and *De incertitudine*.¹⁰ In the studies of Agrippa's work during these centuries, *De sacramento matrimonii* occupies a somewhat special place. Since the content of *De sacramento matrimonii*, in contrast to that of *De nobilitate et praecellentia foeminei sexus*, *De originali peccato* and *De incertitudine*, was never seen as shocking or strange (Dupin, whose judgment on Agrippa and specially about *De originali peccato* was cited above, wrote about *De sacramento matrimonii*: 'Le Traité du sacrement de mariage est plus raisonnable et plus conforme à la doctrine de l'église'),¹¹ it could not be cited as a text to confirm the reputation of Agrippa as an intellectual charlatan. On the other hand, it was considered precisely on account of its 'normality' as an anomaly in the corpus of Agrippa's writings. Prost's judgment is typical in this regard: 'Cet opuscule n'est nullement une œuvre badine, comme on pourrait le croire. C'est un plaidoyer plein de chaleur et de sentiment en faveur du mariage' (vol. 2, pp. 119–120).

3. *The theme of marriage versus celibacy in Agrippa's writings*

In Agrippa's time, theologians writing in favor of marriage risked being criticized as persons who considered the institution of marriage to be more valuable than celibacy, and hence of being accused of Lutheranism. The criticism raised against Erasmus's *Encomium matrimonii* is typical in this respect. In the case of *De sacramento matrimonii*,

⁷ Namely the *Collected Treatises* of 1529 (*Index Aureliensis*, no. 101.830) and 1532 (*Index Aureliensis*, nos. 101.846 and 101.849), and a Cologne edition of 1598, which also contains *De incertitudine* and *De nobilitate et praecellentia foeminei sexus* (*Deutsche Gesamtkatalog*, no. 2.3948). The 1598 edition was reprinted a number of times between 1602 and 1714; see for some of these editions the *Deutsche Gesamtkatalog*, nos. 2.3949–3955.

⁸ See *Index Aureliensis*, no. 101.833.

⁹ See *Index Aureliensis*, no. 101.876. *Die deutsche Literatur*, p. 783.

¹⁰ *Die deutsche Literatur*, p. 799.

¹¹ Dupin, *Nouvelle Bibliothèque des auteurs ecclésiastiques*, ed. 1703, p. 143.

the critics objected rather to certain legal points which Agrippa had made concerning the institution of marriage itself, as evidenced by the two points of criticism which the bishop of Vence called to Agrippa's attention. First, the critics observed that Agrippa gave the impression of defending the position that people who had divorced because of adultery could contract another marriage. In the letter to Michel d'Arande, Agrippa answered that this was not what he intended to say, but that in the disputed passage he was maintaining the unity of marriage, which consists according to Scripture in the 'individua carnis unio' (indivisible unity of the flesh). This unity, Agrippa explained, could only be dissolved by adultery, and he underpinned his conviction of the gravity of adultery by appealing to a number of authorities, specially several Church Fathers and the *Decretum Gratiani*.¹² Secondly, the critics objected to the fact that Agrippa had claimed that among those who were exempt from the law of marriage were those who, driven by the spirit of God, had chosen *perpetual* chastity ['perpetuam castitatem delegerunt']. It was argued that the word 'perpetual' was too final and too strict because it implied a lifelong commitment on the part of those who took the vows of chastity:

Urgebat eum hoc verbum 'perpetuam' tanquam rigidum nimis et asperum his qui pro tempore experiuntur in se vires castitatis, nolentes infirmitatem suam adligare perpetuitati. (*Collected Treatises*, fol. E 7^v; *Epistolae*, 4, 7, p. 789)

The word 'perpetual' bothered him [i.e., the Bishop of Vence] as too rigid and difficult for those who temporarily feel in themselves the strength to remain chaste, not wishing to constrain their weakness to a perpetual commitment.

Agrippa answered this objection in a way which illuminates his position on the question of marriage versus celibacy:

Respondi me idcirco non scripsisse 'qui voverunt', sed 'qui delegerunt' aliquo videlicet bono proposito, quo stante et durante exempti sunt a lege matrimonii, nec prius incipiunt obligari connubio, donec incipiant uri, ni forte aulici illi mystae putent melius esse scortari quam nubere. (*Collected Treatises*, fols. E 7^v–E 8^r; *Epistolae*, 4, 7, p. 789)

¹² He mentions Origen, Ambrosius and Augustine; a note in the margin of the *Collected Treatises* refers to C. 32 q. 7 c. 16.

I answered that for this reason I did not write 'those who have vowed,' but 'those who have chosen,' that is, chosen with good intention. During the time in which these intentions are observed, they are exempt from the obligation to marry, and their responsibility toward matrimony does not begin until they begin to feel an inner passion, unless perhaps those priests at court think that it is better to whore than to marry.

In the introduction of his letter to Michel d'Arande, Agrippa had made it clear that he in fact considered abstinence higher than marriage:

Quod si matrimonii sacramentum illis nimium extulisse videar, agant ipsi partes castitatis suae, et facile concedam illis hanc, licet inter sacramenta non numeretur, tamen esse hoc sacramento longe praeferendam. (*Collected Treatises*, fol. E 6^v; *Epistolae*, 4, 7, p. 787)

If I seem to them [i.e., his critics at court] to have excessively praised the sacrament of matrimony, let them play the role of defenders of their chastity themselves, and I for my part will directly recognize that chastity, even though it is not one of the sacraments, is to be greatly preferred to this sacrament [i.e., marriage].

Agrippa's preference for abstinence over marriage was inspired by his conviction that God disapproved of sexuality, a view which he had defended in detail in *De originali peccato*. Hence, Agrippa considered as the best Christians those persons who were able to withdraw themselves completely from their earthly bonds and devote themselves to mankind's spiritual vocation. For those who could not accomplish this, marriage was the only way to lead a godly life. This point was raised briefly in *De originali peccato*,¹³ and returns prominently in *De sacramento matrimonii*, notably in the section dealing with 'evitatio fornicationis.'

In order to understand Agrippa's theoretical view concerning the merits of chastity versus marriage, it is useful to take a brief look at the *Sermo de vita monastica*, a short address to monks (of unknown date). In this address, Agrippa depicts a hierarchy of ways of living, based like all his theological treatises on Scriptural exegesis.¹⁴ At the bottom of the hierarchy, he places the 'vita peccatrix' [sinful life] of those who do not accept any religion. The middle part of the hier-

¹³ Third perspective (*Collected Treatises*, fols. I 8^v 'Hinc innotescit nobis'–K i^v 'propagatur virginitas'; *Opera*, pp. 559–560). See above, chapter 7, pp. 240–241.

¹⁴ See above, chapter 1, p. 31; the writing was consulted in the *Opera*, vol. 2, pp. 565–575.

archical structure is taken up by those who do have faith; they live either a purgatorial life striving for purification ('vita purgatoria, activa') or a life of discipline enjoying the experience of divine wisdom ('vita disciplinae, contemplativa'). The top of the hierarchy is formed by those who are monks in the true sense of the word, that is, those who imitate the life of Christ ('vita perfecta, exemplaris') in that they transcend the 'vita activa' and the 'vita contemplativa.' Like Christ, the true monk both enjoys, untroubled by any vice, the contemplation of the divine, and sets an example by his actions for his fellow men. From this hierarchy, it is clear that Agrippa considered abstinence from all earthly things, including sexual abstinence, as the essential external characteristic of the most excellent way of life.

4. *Psychological value of marriage*

From the above, it is clear that Agrippa considered marriage for theological reasons as a religious duty for all those who (like himself) did not have the spiritual vocation for celibacy. But *De sacramento matrimonii* makes clear that Agrippa believed that there is also a psychological value to marriage. According to Agrippa, this value is also completely defined by God, in Genesis 2, 18: 'It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a suitable partner for him.' In this context, Agrippa emphasizes, both in the form of abstract Biblical exegesis and in the form of a fervent hortatory appeal to the reader, that the mutual affection between man and woman must serve as the basis of every marriage contract, and he also condemns the common practice of arranged marriages. This aspect causes *De sacramento matrimonii* to exceed, if only to a small degree, the level of the purely theological and legalistic treatise on the sacrament of marriage challenging current opinions and practices, and to become in part a humanistic commendation of marriage. In this respect, it can be compared with such an eminently humanistic discourse on marriage as Erasmus's *Encomium matrimonii*, but it must be stressed that, mainly on account of Agrippa's extremely negative attitude toward sexuality, his philogamy seems on the whole of a completely different nature from that of Erasmus.¹⁵

¹⁵ See Van der Poel, 'Was Agrippa von Nettesheim an Erasmusian Humanist?', for

5. *Structure and content of De sacramento matrimonii*

In the following pages, a full survey of the content of the treatise and explanatory remarks is presented. The sources used by Agrippa, which are for the most part indicated (albeit incompletely by modern standards) in the margin of the first edition (fols. A iij^r–B vij^r), and reproduced in the *Collected Treatises* (fols. D 6^v–E 6^r) and, in part, in the *Opera*, pp. 538–549, have been identified. Since the *editio princeps* is very rare, I have refrained from referring to it; the page references are to the *Collected Treatises* and the *Opera*.

* * * *

The structure of *De sacramento matrimonii* can be schematically presented as follows:

1. Introduction and main thesis (*Collected Treatises*, fols. D 6^v ‘Sacramentum matrimonii antiquissimum est’—D 7^v ‘qui duxerit moechatur’; *Opera*, pp. 538–539).
2. Argumentation
 2. a. The three purposes of marriage (*Collected Treatises*, fols. D 7^v ‘Nunc in quos fines usque’—E 2^r ‘Sed modo revertar’; *Opera*, pp. 539–543).
 2. a. 1. ‘adiutorium’ [companionship] (*Collected Treatises*, fols. D 7^v ‘Prior habetur ubi’—D 8^v ‘ausus fuerit dimittere’; *Opera*, pp. 539–541).
 2. a. 2. ‘propagatio’ [preservation of the human race] (*Collected Treatises*, fols. D 8^v ‘Alterum finem matrimonii’—E 1^v ‘Deum placat et reveretur’; *Opera*, pp. 541–542).
 2. a. 3. ‘evitatio fornicationis’ [avoidance of fornication] (*Collected Treatises*, fols. E 1^v ‘Tertium matrimonii usum’—E 2^r ‘Sed modo revertar’; *Opera*, pp. 542–543).

a brief comparison between Erasmus’s *Encomium matrimonii* and Agrippa’s *De sacramento matrimonii* and discussion of the literature on this topic. Compare Morley, vol. 2, pp. 84–95, who stresses that Agrippa had a higher and more Christian view of marriage than the average Catholic theologian.

2. b. Two categories of people exempted from the duty to marry (*Collected Treatises*, fols. E 2^r 'Tam indissolubile hoc sanctissimum vinculum'—E 2^v 'illos impedita natura excusat'; *Opera*, pp. 543–544).

2. c. Denunciation of current abuses concerning marriage (*Collected Treatises*, fols. E 2^v 'Quicumque vero ex alterutro hoc hominum genere non sunt'—E 4^r 'sed et quae ad religionem divinam'; *Opera*, pp. 544–546).

3. Conclusion: advice to those who must get married (*Collected Treatises*, fols. E 4^r 'Tu igitur quicumque vis uxorem ducere'—E 6^r 'consortio alienus'; *Opera*, pp. 546–549).

* * * *

1. Introduction and main thesis (*Collected Treatises*, fols. D 6^v (Sacramentum matrimonii antiquissimum est)—D7^v (qui duxerit moechatur) (*Opera*, pp. 538–539).

Referring to Genesis 1, 27–28, Agrippa emphasizes several aspects which make of the institution of marriage a unique institution: it is the oldest sacrament, it is the only precept which God had formulated before the Fall, and it is the only institution which is based completely on God's will, without any contribution from humankind. In this context, Agrippa observes, referring to the turning of water into wine at the wedding at Cana (John 2, 1–10), that it is glorified by miracles. Marriage is also practically the only precept serving to remedy the Fall which is to be found not only among Christians, but among people from all cultures and religions. He defines the purpose of marriage as the preservation of the human race, thus providing a justification for the carnal act,¹⁶ and emphasizes that God intended marriage to constitute the indissoluble bond between man and woman. He supports this idea with references to Genesis 2, 23: 'this one [i.e. woman] is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh'; 2, 24: 'that is why a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, and the two of them become one body'; Matthew 19, 5:

¹⁶ A note in the margin refers to the relevant canonical rule, namely C. 32 q. 2 c. 3.

'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'; and Mark 10, 7: 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother.' This point leads to the formulation of the thesis that nothing in the world can dissolve the marriage bond (with a reference to Mark 10, 9: 'what God has joined together, no human being must separate'), save fornication. In support of this thesis, Agrippa refers to a series of various rules from canon law,¹⁷ and he concludes his statement with a quotation from Matthew 19, 9: 'I say to you, whoever divorces his wife (unless the marriage is unlawful) and marries another commits adultery.'

2. Argumentation

2. a. The three purposes of marriage (*Collected Treatises*, fols. D 7^v 'Nunc in quos fines ususque'—E 2^r 'Sed modo revertar'; *Opera*, pp. 539–543).

Agrippa defines three reasons for which marriage was instituted, namely companionship, preservation of the human race, and avoidance of fornication. This three-fold division is the result of the view of marriage as an image of the Trinity and is very common in scholastic sources, which discern three elements in the essence, the institution, the cause, the benefits and the impediments of marriage.¹⁸ Agrippa then goes on to discuss each reason in detail.

2. a. 1. 'adiutorium' [companionship] (*Collected Treatises*, fols. D 7^v 'Prior habetur ubi'—D 8^v 'ausus fuerit dimittere'; *Opera*, pp. 539–541).

¹⁷ The references are identified in the margin of the 1526 and 1529 editions: C. 32 q. 7 c. 27 (infertility is not a legitimate reason to repudiate a wife), C. 32 q. 5 c. 17 and 18 (neither man nor wife is allowed to dismiss the partner), C. 32 q. 5 c. 19 (a passage from a letter of Jerome stating that a man may only repudiate his wife in the case of adultery) and C. 27 q. 2 c. 6 (a quotation from Isidorus's *Etymologiae* stating that man and woman are allied from the moment of their engagement onward), C. 32 q. 7 c. 1 (a quotation from Augustine's *De bono coniugali* stating that even after a separation the sexual intercourse of man or wife with another person is considered to be adulterous), C. 33 q. 5 c. 4 (a quotation from a letter of Augustine stating that a man does not have the right to rescind the pledge of sexual restraint which he has sworn to his wife by means of the wedding contract).

¹⁸ An excellent example of this kind of treatment is provided by Anselmus of Laon (ca. 1050–1117), one of the leading figures of the early scholastic period, in

The testimony which forms the nucleus of this point in Agrippa's argumentation is Genesis 2, 18: 'The Lord God said: It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a suitable partner for him.' Man, he observes, is a social animal ('animal sociabile') and as such he has certain natural and moral obligations which he can best fulfill within marriage. As a supreme example to illustrate how God desired marriage as an institution for the comfort and security of human life, he mentions the relationship between King David in his old age and the young virgin Abishag (1 Kings 1, 1-4). Agrippa then briefly describes the intensity of the marriage bond, by enumerating all the things which husband and wife share and by stressing once more that nothing can undo it. This point is reinforced with several Biblical references, namely the already mentioned Genesis 2, 24, and 7, where Noah is ordered to take a pair, that is, a male and a female, of each animal into the ark. Agrippa also observes that no human law prohibits children from leaving their parents,¹⁹ but rather that sometimes necessity forces, and utility or good judgment advises, them to do so, whereas no law or reason of any kind permits or advises spouses to leave one another.

2. a. 2. propagatio [preservation of the human race] (*Collected Treatises*, fols. D 8^v 'Alterum finem matrimonii'—E 1^v 'Deum placat et reveretur'; *Opera*, pp. 541-542).

The essential testimony at this point in Agrippa's argumentation is Genesis 1, 28: 'God blessed them [i.e., Adam and Eve], saying: be fertile and multiply.' In the conclusion of *De originali peccato*, Agrippa had already discussed this passage, stressing that, with regard to the Edenic state, this text must be understood allegorically. Here, he stresses that this command was repeated after the Fall: Genesis 9, 1 'God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them: Be fertile and multiply and fill the earth,' and that, in the post-paradisaical context, it must be understood quite literally:

Quae benedictio post diluvium rursus ex integro eisdem verbis instaurata est, cuius is effectus est, ut reddat homo naturae quod mutuo a natura accepit, ac ad imaginem Dei similes sibi filios producat et nutriet,

the *Sententie*; see *Systematische Sentenzen*, ed. F.P. Bliemetzrieder, Münster i.W., 1919, pp. 112-113.

¹⁹ A note in the margin refers to Inst. 1, 12 and Cod. 8, 49; there is also an unclear reference to the *Summa* of Azo.

et publicam ipsam generis humani societatem quadam successione reddat servetque perpetuam. (*Collected Treatises*, fol. D 8^v; *Opera*, p. 541)

This blessing was totally renewed with the same words after the Flood. The effect of this benediction is that man must deliver to nature what he in his turn has accepted from nature, and so he must engender and raise progeny who resemble him in the image of God, and he must sustain and perpetuate the community of the human race by means of a line of descendants.

In support of this statement, references are made in the margins of the 1526 and 1529 editions to the *Evangelium pseudo-Matthaei*,²⁰ and several juridical sources.²¹ Agrippa also refers to God's covenant with Abraham, through the blessing of which Abraham did not stay childless, and Sarah by miracle produced offspring even though she was an old woman (see Genesis 15; 18; 21). Agrippa also refers to Genesis 25, 21 and 30, 1–2 to show that the Patriarchs Isaac and Jacob were also aware that God's benediction could overcome the infertility of their wives.

In this context, Agrippa argues that only children born from a legal marriage are considered legitimate,²² that illegitimate children are not allowed into the priesthood²³ and have no rights to the legal inheritance of worldly goods.²⁴ He concludes this section with the statement that it is only possible within marriage to produce children in such a way that all the legal, natural and theological demands are satisfied, and thus God is suitably appeased and honored.²⁵

2. a. 3. 'evitatio fornicationis' [avoidance of fornication] (*Collected Treatises*, fols. E 1^v 'Tertium matrimonii usum'—E 2^r 'Sed modo revertar'; *Opera*, pp. 542–543).

²⁰ *Evangelia apocrypha*, ed. C. de Tischendorf, pp. 51–112. The passage Agrippa has in mind is possibly c. 2, where Anna complains about her infecundity, or c. 7, where the priests react negatively to Mary's wish to remain unmarried.

²¹ Namely C. 32 q. 4 c. 2, a passage which contains a long quotation from Augustine in which a large number of Old Testament examples are enumerated mentioning the producing of progeny.

²² He refers to three legal and canonical sources, namely Cod. 5, 27, X. 4. 17. 5 and C. 32 q. 4 c. 15.

²³ The margin of the 1526 edition refers to Deuteronomy 24, the margin of the 1529 edition to Deuteronomy 14.

²⁴ References to Cod. 5, 5; Nov. 89, 15; Inst. 3, 5, 4; C. 32 q. 4 c. 9, and X. 4. 17. 7.

²⁵ The margin provides an additional relevant legal reference, namely C. 33 q. 5 c. 1.

The testimony which forms the heart of this point in Agrippa's argumentation is 1 Corinthians 7, 9: 'but if they cannot exercise self-control they should marry, for it is better to marry than to be on fire.' Agrippa adds to this testimony 1 Timothy 5, 14, from which he deduces that second marriages for widows are allowed by the Bible for exactly the same reason: 'So I would like younger widows to marry, have children, and manage a home, so as to give the adversary no pretext for maligning us.' Agrippa's extremely negative attitude toward sexuality becomes very manifest when he stresses in the context of these Biblical testimonies that marriage contracts concluded solely for the purpose of avoiding illicit sex are just as worthy and valid as other marriage contracts, even though the motives of the contracting parties are less noble, and on condition that the *debitum matrimonii* aims solely at procreation.²⁶ He also stresses, quoting 1 Corinthians 7, 4 as proof, that both partners must freely perform the marital act: 'A wife does not have authority over her own body, but rather her husband, and similarly a husband does not have authority over his own body, but rather his wife.' At this point he paraphrases a legal rule dealing with the marital act, recorded in several provisions of canon law, which illustrates the strength of the marriage bond, namely the rule that neither husband nor wife is allowed to take the vows or to remain chaste unless the partner gives permission.²⁷ Finally, he refers to the rule that men are not allowed to repudiate a barren wife and marry another woman for the sake of having children, and he observes that this rule was valid even among the Romans, mentioning Valerius Maximus, Plutarch and Dionysius of Halicarnassus as his witnesses.²⁸

2. b. Two categories of people exempted from the duty to marry (*Collected Treatises*, fols. E 2^r 'Tam indissolubile hoc sanctissimum vinculum'—E 2^v 'illos impedita natura excusat'; *Opera*, pp. 543–544).

²⁶ Relevant juridical testimonies referred to in the margin: C. 27 q. 2 c. 24 and C. 32 q. 2 c. 3 (twice).

²⁷ References in the margin: C. 27 (*in margine* 32) q. 2 c. 21; C. 33 q. 4 c. 12 and 13; C. 33 q. 5 c. 1, 5 and 6; C. 33 q. 5 c. 4 and 5.

²⁸ The sources referred to are Valerius Maximus 2, 1, 4 (the case of Spurius Carvilius), Plutarch, *Romulus*, 22 (mention of several laws concerning marriage, including one which permits husbands to repudiate their wives for using poisons, for substituting children, and for adultery), Dionysius of Halicarnassus, 2, 25 (dealing with Romulus's legislation regulating the relationship between husbands and wives).

In this section Agrippa first brings to the fore two further thoughts to argue the thesis that marriage is universal, inviolable, and necessary. First, he argues that God required that the woman through whom His incarnation materialized was legally married, even though the conception was immaculate.²⁹ Thus, He gave His mother as an example for posterity to follow. Secondly, Agrippa mentions that under the Old Law, unmarried men were barred from the temple and were also otherwise legally discriminated against.³⁰ He next formulates the main idea of this section: two categories of people are exempt from the duty to get married, namely those who are by nature unable to perform the marital act, namely the sexually incapable ('frigidi,' 'impotentes,' 'eunuchi'), the possessed ('maleficiati'), the insane ('furiosi'), and children ('pueri') on the one hand, and those who have chosen perpetual chastity under the influence of the spirit of God on the other hand.

2. c. Denunciation of current abuses concerning marriage (*Collected Treatises*, fols. E 2^v 'Quicumque vero ex alterutro hoc hominum genere non sunt'—E 4^r 'sed et quae ad religionem divinam'; *Opera*, pp. 544–546).

In this section Agrippa briefly expresses his disapproval over several current abuses concerning marriage. To justify his disapproval, he frequently refers to Biblical testimonies and testimonies from canon law.

First, he opposes the practice of prearranged marriages, stressing that the marriage bond must be entered into freely by both partners on the basis of *consensus amoris*.³¹ He celebrates the strength and holiness of marital love, referring once more to the Biblical precept that men and women must enter into marriage (Genesis 2, 24; Matthew 19, 5) and condemns sharply the sinfulness of all parents

²⁹ Notes in the margin of the 1526 and 1529 editions refer to the relevant Biblical testimonies: Matthew 1, 18–25 (conception and birth of Christ), Luke 1, 25–56 (annunciation to Mary), Luke 2, 1–7 (birth of Christ).

³⁰ A note in the margin of the 1526 and 1529 edition refers to one particular testimony, namely the *Evangelium pseudo-Matthaei*. The note possibly refers to the passage where a priest forbids Joachim to be present at the offerings because he has no children; ed. Tischendorf, p. 55.

³¹ Legal references mentioned in the margin are C. 31 q. 2 c. 1 and 2 (adult sons cannot be forced into marriage by their fathers) and C. 32 q. 2 c. 16 (widows and virgins must choose husbands on the basis of their own free will).

and guardians who force the children in their charge to contract marriages against their will and, in defiance of the Biblical precept,³² for the sake of financial gain, social advancement or political power. These marital arrangements give rise, Agrippa observes, to disputes, hatred, abuse, separations, and sometimes even murder among the partners, thus making it appear as if the devil had concluded them.³³

Secondly, Agrippa denounces the intervention of the secular authorities in marriage contracts, and the existing legal obstacles in many communities to marriages, namely the levy of tithes on the dowry. Those who are responsible for these rules are called, in Agrippa's familiar and uncompromising terminology, enemies of God, blasphemers of Jesus Christ, destroyers of the Church and contaminators of sacred rites. Quoting Matthew 21, 41, Agrippa states that God will put these wretched men to a wretched death.

Thirdly, Agrippa attacks the custom of *charivari* (with various alternative spellings), a spontaneous gathering of people who express disapproval by screaming and making discordant noises on pots and kettles in front of the house of a widower or a widow who is marrying for the second time, and the practice which grew out of this tradition of imposing a tax on widowers who were remarrying. This practice existed in Geneva, where Agrippa was staying when he married for the second time,³⁴ and it is thus likely that he himself had had to pay this tax. These are the words in which he condemns the practice:

Est insuper et alia non minus damnabilis consuetudo quae apud multas nationes inolevit, quod secundas nuptias nescio quis contumeliis vicatim prosequantur. Insuper et certa pecunia mulctant secundo nubentes eamque sodalitio quodam suo devorandam congerunt, huiusque tam nefarie in divinum mysterium contumeliae Ioseph virum beatissimae

³² A marginal note in the 1526 and 1529 editions refers to Exodus 20 (the ten commandments), Judges 14 (marriage of Samson), and Genesis 24 (marriage of Isaac and Rebecca).

³³ The margin of the 1526 and 1529 editions refers to Tobit 6, 16–17, where it is stated that those who exclude God from their minds when they enter into marriage are governed by the devil; see the text of the Vulgate.

³⁴ See Droz, *Chemins de l'hérésie*, vol. 2, pp. 8–9. See for a definition of the custom of *charivari* and the terminology of the word P. Monet, *Invantaire des deux langues françoise et latine* [...], Lyon, 1636, repr. 1973, s.v. *charivari*; A. Furetière, *Dictionnaire universel* [...], The Hague-Rotterdam, 1690, repr. Geneva, 1970, s.v.: *charivari*. For sources describing the custom see A. Tobler—E. Lommatzsch, *Altfraanzösisches Wörterbuch*, vol. 2, s.v.: *chalivali*.

Mariae virginis faciunt patronum. Invenit autem haec sodalitia seu fraternitates diabolus, et ira Dei tradidit illos in reprobum sensum,³⁵ ut applaudentes ad adulteria concubinatus et fornicationes insectentur secundas nuptias, ac si gratia Dei in illis sit evacuata, illudentes sacramento, cui omnis debetur honor, reverentia atque libertas. (*Collected Treatises*, fols. E 3^v–E 4^r; *Opera*, pp. 545–546)

There is also another equally condemnable custom which has grown up in many nations, namely that second marriages are followed through the streets with exceptional invective. They also fine with a certain sum those who marry for the second time, and they gather that fine to be spent by a fraternity which they have founded. Of this heinous insult to a divine sacrament they make Joseph, the husband of the Holy Virgin Mary, the patron. The devil founded these fellowships or brotherhoods, and the wrath of God has led them astray, so that they approve of adultery, concubinage and fornication, but condemn second marriages, laughing (as if divine grace had gone from them) at a sacrament to which every honor, respect and freedom from restraint is due.

Agrippa calls upon the dedicatee of his treatise to suppress this custom, first in her own dominion, then in the rest of France, stressing that as a secular leader she is responsible for the advancement of Christianity.³⁶

3. Conclusion: advice to those who must get married (*Collected Treatises*, fols. E 4^r ‘Tu igitur quicumque vis uxorem ducere’—E 6^r ‘consortio alienus’; *Opera*, pp. 546–549).

The conclusion begins and ends with a dramatic shift from a non-committal tone to a more emotionally involved style, briefly discussed in chapter 3 above, pp. 104–105. In his first direct address to the reader (quoted in full in our chapter 3), Agrippa stresses that the spouses must make an effort to show to full advantage the emotional significance of marriage (‘sit amor in causa, non census,’ etc.) and the equality of the partnership between husband and wife within mar-

³⁵ A note in the margin of the 1526 and 1529 editions refers to Romans 1, 18: ‘The wrath of God is indeed being revealed from heaven against every impiety and wickedness of those who suppress the truth by their wickedness.’

³⁶ A note in the margin refers to Augustine, ‘lib. 4 (3 in the ed. 1526) ad Chrisost[omum]’ in support of this argument. It is unclear which writing Agrippa has in mind.

riage ('illa tibi non subsit, sed adsit,' etc.). With mutual love and respect as the emotional foundation, man and wife are jointly responsible, each with his and her particular duties, for continuing the family. Agrippa stresses the equality of man and wife within marriage, by pointing out that if a marriage fails, the husband is as guilty as the wife. But the humanistic content and tone are also coupled with purely formalistic and legal considerations, since a note in the margin refers to a canon from the *Decretum Gratiani*, C. 32 q. 6 c. 2, which prescribes that, in the area of sexuality, the husband should set the same moral demands on himself as on his wife; the canon in question is a citation from St. Augustine's treatise *De sermone Domini in monte*.

This summons is further justified with a series of references to ancient cultures, showing that even among the heathens marriage was a venerated institution aiming at the preservation of families and of the state at large. Agrippa thus recalls that Romulus was willing to wage war in order to assure that enough women were available to establish the Roman state (the rape of the Sabine women). The reason why Romulus needed the Sabine women, Agrippa explains, was not only because he wanted to secure enough offspring for the state, but also because he realized that the running of a household is necessary practice for those who wish to rule a state. He also claims that marriage is a practical lesson in moral philosophy, because the spouses learn to practice all the basic virtues, such as 'prudentia,' 'temperantia' and 'pietas'; he proves this point by referring to Socrates's dictum that he had learned more in the field of moral philosophy from his wife than from Anaxagoras and Archelaus. Next, in order to stress the social and psychological importance of marriage, he refers to a variety of juridical statements,³⁷ and mentions in general the legislation in favor of marriage approved by Lycurgus, Plato and Emperor Augustus. Agrippa also refers to or cites Biblical and juridical statements illustrating how adultery is universally considered

³⁷ Namely Cod. 5, 27, 8 aut. ib. posita (= Nov. 89, c. 12 and 15) (on natural children), C. 32 q. 4 c. 9 (a statement from a sermon of Ambrose to the effect that unmarried men should not beget children from a female slave, since those children cannot be legal heirs), Abbas Panormitanus ad v. 'per venerabilem', X 4. 17. 13 (ed. Paris, 1585, col. 1540), and the commentary of Baldus on Dig. 1, 5, 19. There is also a reference in the margin of the 1526 and 1529 editions to the Book of Wisdom 4; Wisdom 3, 13-18 and 4, 1-6 deals with childlessness; one of the thoughts formulated is that a large number of children is no blessing for the irreligious.

to be the worst crime, to be punished by the most severe penalty, namely death.³⁸ In this context, he stresses that Roman law permitted husbands to repudiate without trial a wife caught in the act of committing adultery, and that Church law punishes the murder of a wife ('uxoricidia') with much greater severity than parricide.³⁹ Agrippa observes that this is fully justified, since we have our parents as a result of a natural process, whereas it is God who provides us with a wife as a companion and a support. Therefore, a crime committed against a wife is a crime committed against God. These remarks are concluded with the condemnation of the current legal practice which allowed adultery and uxoricide to go unpunished, whereas thieves and those guilty of other minor offenses were put to death. According to Agrippa, the only explanation for these reprehensible practices is that the judges have been led astray by their idolatry. To illustrate this thought, a note in the margin of the 1526 and 1529 editions refers to Romans 1 and Matthew 15.

In conclusion, Agrippa repeats his emotional call in favor of marriage, in the form of a personal address to the reader, stressing this time that the nature of the sexual drive makes it necessary for those who wish to be true human beings and Christians to marry (see chapter 3 above, p. 104 for the text of this appeal). Apart from those who are less than human beings by natural impotence or more than human being by divine grace (that is, the two groups discussed above in section 2. b.), all those who hold marriage in contempt must be excluded from Christian society as having been disowned by God.

³⁸ Namely Leviticus 20, 10; Deuteronomy 22, 20–22; Exodus 22, 1–5 (the Old Law prescribed the death penalty by stoning for adultery, but only a fine for theft); Dig. 48, 5, 24; Cod. 9, 9, 19 or 29; Dig. 48, 5, 25; Nov. 117, c. 14 and 15; C. 24 q. 1 c. 21 (a statement from Jerome to the effect that the severity of the penalty must be in proportion to the gravity of the criminal offence).

³⁹ A note in the margin of the 1526 and 1529 editions refers to C. 33 q. 2 c. 8, a text from Pope Stephen V dealing with the punishment for uxoricide.

CONCLUSION

His correspondence and the writings published during his lifetime show Agrippa to have been an independent and extremely versatile scholar, whose attention was mainly focused on the investigation of nature (*res arcanae; secreta naturae*) and theology. At first sight, there seems to be little coherence in his writings. However, a careful reading reveals that Agrippa's Neoplatonic way of thinking is what brings coherence and cohesion to his writings. As a Neoplatonist, he was hostile to scholasticism as a method for studying theology. The opposition which he experienced at the hands of the professional theologians profoundly influenced his attitude over the years. While consistently seeking a scholarly debate with the professional theologians over controversial issues, he met with a constant refusal on their part, as a result of which he finally attacked them fiercely in his published writings.

Agrippa's theological thought starts from the principle that there is a strict division between the material world, approachable through our senses and intellect, and the spiritual world, approachable through faith alone. The main consequence of this tenet is that humankind on its own is unable to understand God's plan, but that we must rely on faith to reach this understanding. Agrippa formulates this thought in many passages of his correspondence (e.g. *Epistolae*, 2, 14, directed to the young law student Cantiuncula) and writings, for instance in a well-known passage in chapter 100 of *De incertitudine*, where he expresses this thought by means of the Lutheran dictum 'sola fide' [by faith alone].

This Neoplatonic way of thinking explains why Agrippa rejects scholastic theology. In his view, scholastic theology confuses the study of created things with the study of divine things. More specifically, Agrippa feels that scholastic theology wrongly attempts to underpin and clarify rationally the truths of religion by means of artificial proofs and logical reasoning, as he clearly explains, for instance, in the *Oratio habita Papiae* and in chapter 5 of *De triplici ratione cognoscendi Deum*. However, Agrippa's Neoplatonic attitude does not mean that he is an antirationalistic, mystical thinker. Thus, we have seen that he welcomes scholasticism as a useful method for refuting heretics through

force of argument. In his own scholarly practice, Agrippa opts however for a different method of research, more in conformity with his Neoplatonic background. More specifically, he embraces a theology which confines itself to the study of those elements in Christian revelation which remain uncertain. This implies that theologians should not debate the articles of faith and the other points concerning which there exists a dogma or binding council pronouncements embodying religious truth. In their research, theologians should aim at reaching an understanding of the profound truth concerning the uncertainties in the revelation, that is, at reaching a proper understanding of God's intentions. Furthermore, theologians must devote their efforts to encouraging the faithful to live according to the moral standards taught by the Gospel.

In order to perform these tasks adequately, Agrippa believes that theologians must focus on Biblical study. The true meaning of the Bible should be looked for by means of careful study of the text itself, and by means of careful evaluation of the exegetical work of those theologians who have studied the Bible in good faith and in accordance with Agrippa's epistemological principles. For Agrippa, this includes, besides the writings of a large number of canonical writers (that is, the Church Fathers and certain medieval theologians), those writers belonging to the *prisca theologia* and the Hermetic tradition. Agrippa follows this method of research and observes these doctrinal restrictions in all his theological writings. On the whole, he shows himself to be a genuine humanist, who detests the moral and intellectual climate then prevailing in the Church, although his emphasis on spiritual introspection and the important role of the *prisca theologia* in his theology secure for him a special place among the humanists.

Besides Agrippa's antagonism to scholasticism as a system, an important aspect of his activity as a theologian is the fact that he consistently tried to enter into a debate with those theologians of his day who practised scholastic theology, and who were opposed to his ideas and to his method of research. As we have seen, Agrippa's theological opinions were on several occasions attacked by the professional theologians as being heretical, namely in 1509, in 1518 and in 1530. Each time, Agrippa defended himself in writing, by refuting the charges of heresy and also by denouncing the arrogant attitude of his opponents, who preferred to condemn rather than to argue and discuss. What Agrippa fought against in these self-defenses was the

tendency of the professional theologians to monopolize the debate on theological matters and to ostracize those scholars who did not share their views and who followed different methods of research, by identifying them as heretics. It disturbed Agrippa to the utmost that such theologians, through their inquisitorial activity, were interrupting the tradition of free exchange of ideas in theology, something which, as he saw it, went back to the time of the Church fathers. In concrete terms, Agrippa claimed for scholars the right of freedom of opinion concerning subjects for which the Church has not formulated a universal doctrine, and the right, sanctioned by custom, to defend oneself against charges of heresy, stressing that a scholar cannot be convicted as a heretic unless he perseveres in maintaining a view which he knows to be opposed to the doctrine of the Church.

Given the vehemence of Agrippa's outbursts against scholastic theology, it might seem to some as if we are looking at a case of the pot calling the kettle black. I would argue, however, that this is not so, and that Agrippa genuinely tried to bridge the chasm between humanists and scholastics, and continued this effort until the Louvain theologians condemned his *De incertitudine*. The following considerations have given rise to this view.

Agrippa's writings are without exception learned treatises, whose unsophisticated style reveals that, in practical terms, he stood a lot closer to university theology than his rejection of its epistemological basis might suggest. Agrippa's writings thus lack all literary pretension; hence their intention could not be misunderstood by the theologians, unlike for instance Erasmus's declamation *Encomium matrimonii* [Praise of Marriage], whose rhetorical form and literary style was neither understood by, nor acceptable to the theologians. In this respect, the enormous difference in style between Agrippa's *De sacramento matrimonii* and Erasmus's *Encomium matrimonii* indeed shows how differently Agrippa and Erasmus approached theological subjects. In this context, it is also significant that Agrippa correctly compares, in the *Querela* (fol. L vi^v), the genre of declamation as he practises it with scholastic genres such as *opiniones*, *disputationes* and *problemata*, and not with the classical *suasoria*.

Considering the predominantly scholarly nature of Agrippa's writings, it was in my view entirely reasonable that Agrippa should expect the professional theologians to refute his ideas rather than flatly condemn them. This is true, I would suggest, also for *De incertitudine*, Agrippa's most rhetorical writing, published in 1530. This declamation

contains sarcastic passages directed against, among others, the professional theologians, and, given Agrippa's comparison of his work with Erasmus's declamation *Encomium moriae* [Praise of Folly] in the *Querela*, it is quite possible that he considered his work in part as a satire. Nevertheless, *De incertitudine* remains in essence, as we have discussed, a scholarly writing, containing a straightforward account of reasons and examples to underpin a scholarly thesis formulated at the beginning of the work, as well as the invitation to a scholarly exchange of views. It is in this respect that, as I see it, the position of Agrippa differs somewhat from that of Erasmus. For unlike Agrippa, Erasmus had in fact made extensive use of the literary weapon of satire to ridicule the theologians before a wide audience, specially in his *Praise of Folly*. Understandably, the great popularity of this declamation only further reinforced the theologians' feeling of having been derided by Erasmus, and one could claim with some justification that after the *Praise of Folly*, Erasmus could not expect the professional theologians to exchange arguments with him calmly and impartially. Such was not the case, however, with Agrippa, in any event not until the publication of *De incertitudine*.

But how are we then to judge the 1533 *Apologia*, which does contain a great deal of satire, and which, as we discussed, was meant as a public attack against the theologians? I would argue that Agrippa turned to using the weapon of ridicule in public (for in his correspondence the stabs of sarcasm at the expense of the theologians date from much earlier) only after he reached the point of no longer believing a meaningful dialogue with the theologians to be at all possible. Given his experiences with the theologians, this moment came remarkably late, and this also reveals in my view Agrippa's serious effort to open a meaningful dialogue with the theologians. Let us briefly recapitulate the sequence of events which led to Agrippa's outburst in 1533.

In 1510, after his public lectures on Reuchlin's *De verbo mirifico* at the University of Dôle were attacked behind his back by the provincial of the Franciscan order in Burgundy, he confined himself to modestly reminding his opponent of his moral duty as a scholar to respect another man's opinion. In 1518 Agrippa was also entirely prepared to enter into a debate with his opponent. He responded moderately to the charges of heresy delivered against him from the pulpit, by issuing an invitation for a public debate in the form of a

series of *Propositiones* stating his views. It was only after an anonymous condemnation of these *Propositiones* was put into circulation that Agrippa changed his tone and colored with sarcasm his defense against this condemnation, which, as he found out, had been written by the Dominican Salin. But even so, it is not certain that the text of this *Defensio*, as we have it, actually comprises the text which he wrote and handed to his opponent in 1519. As was argued in chapter one above, it is possible that he sharpened its wording before its publication in 1534, in the light of his subsequent experiences with the professional theologians. These experiences include not only Brennonius's report by letter of the continuation of the debate on the *trinubium* in Metz after Agrippa's departure, but also and primarily his failure to enter into a debate with the Louvain theologians who condemned *De incertitudine*.

Furthermore, it is significant that Agrippa published his reaction to the condemnation only after the Louvain theologians had left Agrippa's request for a reply unanswered for over a year. It was, I believe, this affront which finally made him decide to publish his *Apologia* and *Querela*, not only as a self-defense aiming at convincing his opponents, but also as a pamphlet whose goal was to gather support against a common enemy. This change of attitude finally took root in Agrippa as a result of the efforts of the Cologne Inquisitor to prevent the publication of *De occulta philosophia*. Hence, he published in rapid succession four writings in which he championed humanistic theology and denounced the professional theologians. These writings are *De beatissimae Annae monogamia*, containing the polemic with the Dominican Salin, amplified by a number of letters pertaining to the affair and a dedicatory epistle containing raillery against the Dominicans; next, the address to the City Council of Cologne (*Epistolae*, 7, 26); the lost work containing all the scandalous and heretical passages in the works of the Cologne Dominicans; and finally his preface to an edition of the selected works of the Cistercian monk Godoschalcus Moncordius.

In conclusion, two elements characterize Agrippa as a Christian philosopher and theologian, and ensure for him a unique position in the intellectual world of his day. First, his Neoplatonic way of thinking opened his mind to the value of the esoteric tradition for Biblical exegesis. Secondly, he defended with uncommon vigor the notion of free and public exchange of ideas among scholars. There is a certain

heroic character to this attitude, since it brought him into conflict with influential men able to harm his career and even to threaten his livelihood (as Agrippa found to his cost). Many scholars indeed shared Agrippa's frustration with the intolerant attitude of the professional theologians, but not all of them had the moral and intellectual fortitude to oppose it as valiantly as Cornelius Agrippa.

APPENDIX 1

LIST OF PASSAGES FROM *DE INCERTITUDINE* CONDEMNED BY THE SORBONNE ON MARCH 2, 1531

The Faculty of Theology in Paris condemned *De incertitudine* in a resolution containing a pronouncement on twelve books submitted to its judgment (see chapter 4 above, p. 119). Six of these twelve were condemned and ordered to be burned in public. *De incertitudine* is condemned in the following words:

Liber qui dicitur: Cornelii Agrippae de vanitate et incertitudine scientiarum, impressus de novo Parisiis in vico Sorbonico, et prius Coloniae, Lutheranae doctrinae plurimum favet, multa habens contra cultum imaginum, templorum, festorum et caerimoniarum ecclesiae, nec non in scriptores sacri canonis blasphemus est, et ideo publice exurendus. (Duplessis d'Argentré, *Collectio judiciorum de novis erroribus*, vol. 2, p. 85; also quoted in von Murr, pp. 66–67 and Prost, vol. 2, Appendice 10, pp. 464–465)

The book entitled On the vanity and uncertainty of the sciences, by Cornelius Agrippa, printed anew in Paris, *in vico Sorbonico*,¹ and previously in Cologne, strongly favors the Lutheran doctrine, because it contains much which is directed against the cult of images, of churches, of feasts and of ceremonies of the Church. Furthermore, it is blasphemous against the authors of the Holy Canon, and therefore it must be burned in public.

After the pronouncements concerning the twelve books, the resolution lists *verbatim* the allegedly blasphemous passages from each of the six condemned ones. The text of the condemned passages from *De incertitudine* is presented below, with a few corrections and remarks, as it appears in Duplessis d'Argentré, *Collectio judiciorum de novis erroribus*, vol. 2, pp. 88–89.

¹ It seems likely that the resolution refers to the Paris edition which has the printer's (J. Petrus) address on the title page: *in vico Sorbonico* (see below, note 2). See for the 1530 and 1531 editions of *De incertitudine* chapter 4 above, pp. 118–119, note 4.

Excerpta ex libro Cornelii Agrippae de vanitate et incertitudine scientiarum[1.] *De imaginibus, fol. 73*

Mos gentilium corruptus cum ipsi ad fidem Christi converti coeperunt, nostram religionem infecit, et in nostram ecclesiam simulacra et imagines multasque pomparum steriles caerimonias introduxit, quorum nihil omnino fuit apud primos illos et veros Christianos. Hinc coepimus divorum nostrorum multa simulacra in templa nostra traducere et in aras Dei magnis venerationibus collocare et quo hominem veram Dei imaginem in nefas ducimus conscendere, eo insensata transferimus simulacra; illis inclinamus capita, infigimus oscula, offerimus lumina, suspendimus anathemata, accomodamus miracula, fundimus orationes,² denique illis peregrinamur, illis vovemus, illa colimus. [*De incertitudine*, ch. 57, ed. 1531, fol. 73^{r-v}; *Opera*, p. 134]

When the heathens began to be converted to Christianity, their bad habits [namely the adoration of statues] tainted our religion, and introduced into our Church images, statues and many worthless, grandiose ceremonies, which were completely unknown to the first and true Christians. Hence we began to introduce many images of our Saints into our churches, and to place them with great acts of worship on the altars of God. We thus put senseless images in the very place where we consider it a sin to put human beings, who in fact are the true images of God, and we bow our heads to them, kiss them, light candles for them, offer them gifts, credit them with miracles, say prayers for them, and finally undertake pilgrimages for them, make vows to them, and worship them.

[2.] *De templis, fol. 75*

De templis scimus hanc maximam olim fuisse gentilium superstitionem singulis diis sua templa fabricantium, quorum imitatione coeperunt

² The *editio princeps*, the ed. 1531, the Cologne edition printed by M. Novesianus [Royal Library, The Hague, 226 J 22] and the *Opera*-edition read 'coemimus condonationes' [we acquire indulgences from them]. I have not been able to ascertain whether 'fundimus orationes' is a variant reading of the edition which the theologians probably used, namely the Paris edition which mentions the address of the printer, J. Petrus, on the title page (Parisiis, Apud Ioannem Petrum, In Vico Sorbonico; see Prost, vol. 2, Appendice, note 34, p. 528, no. 8). There exists another Paris edition, also from February 1531, which is a reissue of our Antwerp edition of 1531

deinde Christiani suis diis templa inscribere. [. . .] Hebraeis autem in tota natione non nisi unicum templum religiosum erat a Salomone Hierosolymis exstructum, de quo tamen legitur apud Esayam: 'haec dicit Dominus: coelum sedes mea, terra autem scabellum pedum meorum. Quae est ista domus quam aedificas mihi?' [Isaiah 66, 1] Et Stephanus Proto-Martyr ait: 'Salomon aedificavit illi domum, sed excelsus in manufactis non habitat' [Acts 7, 47–48] et Paulus Apostolus ait Atheniensibus: 'Deus non in manufactis templis habitat, qui cum sit Dominus coeli et terrae manibus hominum non colitur tanquam indigens aliquo' [Acts 17, 24–25]. [*De incertitudine*, ch. 58, ed. 1531, fol. 75^r; *Opera*, p. 137]

Concerning temples, we know that in former times the heathens, in their superstition, used to build for each god his own temple. Subsequently, the Christians, imitating this custom, started to dedicate churches to their saints. [. . .] The Jews on the other hand had for their entire nation only one holy temple, which had been built by Solomon. About this temple we read in Isaiah: 'Thus says the Lord: The heavens are my throne, the earth is my footstool. What kind of house can you build for me?' And Steven, the first martyr, says: 'Solomon built a house for him. Yet the Most High does not dwell in houses made by human hands,' and Paul says to the Athenians: 'God does not dwell in sanctuaries made by human hands, because he is the Lord of heaven and earth, nor is he served by human hands because he needs anything.'³

[3.] *De festis*, fol. 75

Festorum etiam dies tam apud gentes quam apud Iudaeos magna religione semper celebres fuere, qui omnes distributim per certa anni tempora, per certos statutos dies Deum colebant, quasi liceret aliquando a divino cultu discedere, aut forsan Deus plus alio tempore se coli velit. Quae idcirco ut probrum Paulus obiecit Galatis ad eos sic scribens: 'Dies observatis et menses et tempora et annos. Timeo ne in vobis frustra et sine causa laboraverim' [Galatians 4, 10–11]. De qua re etiam ad Colossenses admonens praecipit illis dicens:

(Apud Florentissimam Antverpian), with Petrus's colophon (see Nijhoff-Kronenberg II, no. 2252).

³ The translation of *The New English Bible with Apocrypha*, Oxford-Cambridge, 1970, is clearer: 'It is not because he lacks anything that he accepts service at men's hands, for he is himself the universal giver of life and breath and all else.'

'Nemo vos iudicet in cibo et potu, in parte diei festi aut neomeniae, aut sabbatorum, quae sunt umbra futurorum' [Colossians 2, 16–17]. Veris enim et perfectis Christianis nulla est dierum differentia, qui sunt semper in festivitate, semper conquiescentes in Deo, et sine intermissione verum sabbatum agentes. [*De incertitudine*, ch. 59, ed. 1531, fols. 75^v–76^r; *Opera*, pp. 138–139]

Holy days have always been celebrated with a great deal of religious fervor by both the heathens and the Jews. They all worshipped God at certain moments of the year and on certain particular days, as if it were permitted ever to refrain from worshipping, or as if God wished to be worshipped more at certain other times. Paul condemns this habit of the Galatians as disgraceful, when he writes to them: 'You are observing days, months, seasons, and years. I am afraid on your account that perhaps I have labored for you in vain.' Setting a rule on this subject to the Colossians also, he says, admonishing them: 'Let no one, then, pass judgment on you in matters of food and drink or with regard to a festival or new moon or sabbath. These are shadows of things to come.' Indeed, for true and perfect Christians, there exists no difference between the days; they are always celebrating, always seeking repose in God, and observing the true sabbath without interruption.

[4.] *De caeremoniis*

Verum Deus ipse, quem non delectant caro et corpus et sensibilia signa, has exteriores carnalesque caeremonias despicit atque contemnit. [*De incertitudine*, ch. 60, ed. 1531, fol. 77^r; *Opera*, p. 141]

But God Himself, who finds no pleasure in flesh, body and material signs, despises and disparages these superficial and carnal ceremonies.

[5.] *De scriptoribus veteris et novi testamenti*, fol. 149

Et paulo post: Quod ego⁴ dico scriptores⁵ secundum quid alicubi fuisse mendaces, intelligi volo non sponte errantes, sed aut humanitus lapsos, aut mutata Dei sententia deficientes. Sic defecit Moses qui pollicitus

⁴ The *editio princeps*, the ed. 1531, the Cologne edition printed by M. Novesianus, and the *Opera*-edition read 'ergo' [therefore].

⁵ The *editio princeps*, the ed. 1531, the Cologne edition printed by M. Novesianus, and the *Opera*-edition read 'sacros scriptores' [authors of the Holy Writ].

erat populo Israël ut educeret eum de Aegypto et introduceret in terram promissam; [et eduxit quidem de Aegypto, sed ad terram promissam]⁶ non perduxit. Defecit Jonas Ninivitis cladem in quadragessimum diem praenuntians, quae tamen dilata est. Defecit Helias praedicens mala ventura in diebus Achab quae etiam usque in obitum Achab dilata sunt. Defecit Isaiās praedicens mortem Ezechiae in crastinum quae usque ad annos quindecim prorogata est. Defecerunt et alii prophetae et ipsorum omnia vaticinia reperiuntur aliquando sublata, aut suspensa: defecerunt etiam apostoli et evangelistae, defecit Petrus quando reprehensus est a Paulo. Defecit Matthaeus quando scripsit Christum nondum mortuum, dum lancea⁷ latus eius aperuit. Verum iste defectus non est defectus Spiritus Sancti, sed aut defectus prophetae non bene percipientis quid suggerat spiritus vel indicet visio, aut ex aliqua mutatione facta in iis de quibus vaticinabantur, unde contingit oraculi sententiam aut mutari aut differri. Hinc contingit omnes prophetas et scriptores in aliquibus fieri mendaces iuxta Scripturam dicentem: 'Omnis homo mendax.' [*De incertitudine*, ch. 99, ed. 1531, fol. 149^v; *Opera*, pp. 294–295]

And a little farther below: When I say that the authors [of Holy Writ] have been to a certain extent misleading, I do not mean that they erred on purpose, but either that they were mistaken, as human beings can sometimes be, or that God changed His plan. Thus Moses, who had pledged to lead the people of Israël from Egypt and into the promised land, failed. He indeed lead them from Egypt, but did not reach the promised land [see Exodus 3, 16–22; Deuteronomy 4, 21–22]. Jonah failed, by predicting the defeat of the Ninevites on the fortieth day, when in fact it was postponed [see Jonah 3]. Elijah failed, by predicting that evil would come in the days of Ahab, when it was postponed even until after Ahab's death [1 Kings 21, 21; 22, 34–40]. Isaiah failed, by predicting the death of Hezekiah for the next day, when it was delayed for fifteen years [see Isaiah 38, 1–8]. Still other prophets failed, and their predictions are found not to have become reality at all, or to have been delayed. Even the apostles and evangelists failed, and Peter failed when he was reprimanded by Paul [Galatians 2, 11]. Matthew failed when he wrote that Christ was not yet dead, when the spear wounded his side [source unclear].

⁶ These words are omitted in the text of Duplessis d'Argentré as a result of a *saut du même au même*.

⁷ Duplessis d'Argentré erroneously prints 'lanceam.'

But this failure is not a failure of the Holy Spirit, but either a failure of the prophet who does not perceive well what the spirit is telling or what the vision is showing, or a failure caused by a change in the things which were predicted, as a result of which the content of the prophesy is changed or delayed. Hence it happens that all prophets and authors appear to be misleading in certain matters, in accordance with the word of Scripture: 'every human being is a liar' [Romans 3, 4].

After the enumeration of the condemned passages in *De incertitudine*, the resolution is concluded as follows:

Acta sunt haec et conclusa in Collegio Sorbonae post relationem deputatorum pro eo negotio pluries congregatorum die secunda Martii, anno Domini 1530.

These things were discussed and concluded in the College of the Sorbonne following the account of the commission on this matter, which has met on many occasions, on the second of March, in the year of our Lord 1530 (1531 n.s.).⁸

⁸ See for the date Prost, vol. 2, Appendice 10, pp. 464–465.

APPENDIX 2

A HITHERTO UNNOTICED LETTER FROM CANTIUNCULA TO AGRIPPA

Among the letters printed in *De beatissimae Annae monogamia*, fols. O vii^v–O viii^r, there is one from Cantiuncula to Agrippa, which was not included in the *Epistolae* (i.e. in volume 2 of the *Opera*). This letter was hence overlooked by Kisch in his edition of Cantiuncula's letters, which reproduces the text as it appears in the *Opera* (Kisch, *Gestalten und Probleme aus Humanismus und Jurisprudenz*, pp. 314–322).

Dating from July 21, 1519, Cantiuncula's letter must be inserted between *Epistolae*, 2, 33, a letter from Agrippa to Cantiuncula dating from June 2, 1519, and *Epistolae*, 2, 34, a letter from Cantiuncula to Agrippa dating from August 29, 1519. In *Epistolae*, 2, 37, n.d., Agrippa replies to Cantiuncula's letter, thanking him for sending the *Apologia contra Latomi dialogum* (see chapter five above, p. 155). The text of Cantiuncula's letter is as follows:

Claudius Cantiuncula Henrico Cornelio Agrippae

Salve omnis bonae doctrinae asyllum, et amicorum meorum facile princeps. Vix dici queat, neque tu, si dicatur, fidem habeas, quam etiamnum tui et solitae nostrae confabulationis (qua bis pascebar) incomparabili afficiar desiderio, quod quidem nulla possum arte mitigare, quam si te frequentissimis literis ad mutam et mutuam confabulationem impellam. Age ergo doctissime et optime Agrippa, age nullus isthinc ad nos sine tuis literis veniat, ne tantillum laboris amici causa refugias, equidem tam tuus sum, ut et si me dudum omni literarum thesauro longe anteeas, me tamen amicitia et propensissima animi devotione nunquam sis superaturus. Quem animum ut etiam per symbolon agnoscas, en ad te Erasmi apologiam contra Latomi dialogum, una cum oratione Petri Mosellani huic nuntio dedi, si quid aliud novicudatur, faxo perferatur. Quod ex annotationibus Erasmi rogasti, nondum praestare queo, sed propediem curaturus, tibi omnem addico diligentiam. Tuam apologiam adversus Claudium Salini si miseris, hic

excudendam curabo. Interea genetricem meam, et eius (quae scis) negotia, tuae fidei per nostram amicitiam obtestate, etiam atque etiam committo, nihil enim gratus praestare potes. Vale civitatis Metensis ornamentum, et me ut facis ama, tuere. Basileae, decimo secundo Calendas Augusti, Anno M.D. XIX.

Greetings, protector of all beneficial learning and best by far of all my friends. It can hardly be said in words—and if it were said, you would not believe it—how much I still want more than anything else to be with you and to talk with you as we used to (twice now I have enjoyed your conversation). I cannot diminish this desire in any other way than by having you talk with me in silence through the most frequent exchange of letters. Therefore, my good friend and most learned Agrippa, let no one travel from where you are to our city without a letter from you; do not fail this small task for the sake of your friend. I am for my part so much devoted to you that, even if you were to surpass me by far in the writing of a treasure house of letters of all kind, you would never outdo me in friendship and heartfelt dedication. In order that you may appreciate this feeling of mine through some concrete token, I have, as you see, given to the deliverer of this message a copy of Erasmus's apology against the dialogue of Latomus¹ and of the oration by Petrus Mosellanus.² If any other new thing is printed, I will make sure that it gets to you. What you have asked me for from Erasmus's Annotations, I cannot send you yet, but I am doing my utmost on your behalf, and will therefore take care of it very soon. If you send me your apology against Claude Salin, I will have it printed here. In the meantime, I once more specifically entrust you, by virtue of our friendship, with my mother and her troubles. There is indeed nothing you can do to make me more grateful. My best wishes to you, who bring glory to Metz; continue to love me and watch over me. Basel, July 21, 1519.

¹ Latomus had published a dialogue entitled *De trium linguarum et studii theologici ratione* (Antwerp, 1519), in which he opposed the humanistic view that theologians must have a knowledge of Greek and Hebrew, as well as Latin. Erasmus defended the study of the three languages in an *Apologia*, printed first in the Low Countries (Louvain and Antwerp), and then in Basel (printed by Froben, May 1519). See Allen, no. 934, p. 529, note at line 3.

² It is possible that Cantiuncula sent Mosellanus's *Oratio de variorum linguarum cognitione paranda*, delivered and originally published in Leipzig, 1518, and reprinted in Basel, May 1519 (see *The National Union Catalog, Pre-1956 imprints*, vol. 397, p. 253).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

This bibliography lists, under the heading 'Primary texts' the most important primary texts used, and under the heading 'Studies' the books and articles which are cited in the notes or which otherwise made a significant contribution, and furthermore all the studies dealing with Agrippa or with (aspects of) his theological writings which it has been possible to consult.

PRIMARY TEXTS

WORKS BY AGRIPPA

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- *De beatissimae Annae monogamia, ac unico puerperio propositiones abbreviatae & articulatae, iuxta disceptationem Iacobi Fabri Stapulensis in libro de tribus & una, intitulo (. . .) Defensio propositionum praenarratarum contra quendam Dominicastrum earundem impugnatores, qui sanctissimam deiparae virginis matrem Annam conatur ostendere polygamam. Quaedam epistolae super eadem materia atque super lite contra eiusdem ordinis haereticorum magistro habita*, s.l., 1534, [British Library, London, 4823 aaaa 5].
- *De Nobilitate & Praecellentia Foeminei sexus, ad Margaretam Augustam Austriaco[rum] & Burgundionum Principem, Expostulatio cum Ioanne Catilineti super expositione libri Ioannis Caprionis de verbo mirifico, De sacramento Matrimonii declamatio ad Margaretam Alenconiae Ducem, De triplici ratione cognoscendi Deum liber unus ad Guilielmum Paleologum Marcionem Montisferrati*.

Dehortatio Gentilis theologiae ad Episcopum Vasatensem. De Originali peccato disputabilis opinionis declamatio ad episcopum Cyrenensem. Regimen adversus pestilentiam ad eundem episcopum, Antwerp, 1529, [Royal Library, The Hague, 229 G 41].

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– *Zeer vernuftige dog treffelijk waarschijnlijkke reddeneering, Aangaande d'eerste zonde onzer eerste ouderen* (. . .), in: *Twee Doorluchtige en Vernuftige Reddeneeringen. 't Eerste van het lof der edeler Begaaftheen en Uytstekentheen der Vrouwen, Boven alle Aertse Schepselen. 't Tweede van de Eerste Sonde onzer Eerste Ouderen, wat in der daadt die was, daer alle andere sonden en onheylen oorspronkelijk van herkomen* (. . .) *Verduytsd door H.I.T.*, Amsterdam, 1658, [University Library, Louvain-la-Neuve, A 62765]. Translation by Henrijk Takama.

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